

# ROBESPIERRE

SARDOU - GALDEMAR



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MISS ELLEN TERRY  
AS CLARISSÉ DE MAULUÇON IN "ROBESPIERRE."



# Robespierre

*The Story of Victorien Sardou's Play  
Adapted and Novelized under  
his authority*

BY

ANGE GALDEMAR

NEW YORK

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MON CHER GALDEMAR, —

J'achève la lecture du roman qu'avec mon autorisation vous avez tiré de mon drame "Robespierre." Je ne saurais trop me féliciter de vous avoir encouragé à entreprendre ce travail, où vous avez, de la façon la plus heureuse, reproduit les incidents dramatiques de ma pièce et préparé votre lecteur à apprécier l'admirable évocation du passé que Sir Henry Irving lui présente sur la scène du Lyceum. Je ne doute pas que le succès de votre livre ne soit tel que vous le souhaitez ma vieille et constante amitié.

V. L. S. J. J.

MARLY-LE-ROI.



# Robespierre



## CHAPTER I

### THE DISCOVERY

THE Hôtel de Pontivy was situated in the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul, in the very heart of the Marais Quarter, which as early as the opening of this story, the June of 1775, seemed to form by itself a little province in Paris.

It was a magnificent spring night. The sky, luminous with a galaxy of stars, was reflected on the dark waters of the Seine lazily flowing by. A hush rested on the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul, which lay enshrouded in gloom and silence, indifferent to the fairy charms of the hour.

Enclosed in high walls thickly clad with ivy, dark and mysterious as a prison, the Hôtel de Pontivy had all the aspect of some chill cloister apart from men and movement. And yet behind those shutters, where life seemed to pause, wrapped in slumber, some one is keeping watch—the master of the house, Monsieur Jacques Bernard Olivier de Pontivy, Councillor to the King's Parliament, sits late at his work, taking no count of time.

But Monsieur de Pontivy has at last decided ; he raises his eyes to the clock.

“ Twenty past two ! ” he exclaims. “ I really cannot wake that poor fellow ! ”

Through the deep stillness of the vast room, with blinds and curtains drawn, a stillness enhanced by the glare of candelabra lighted up, as if in broad day, the heavy, green-repp armchairs, and bookshelves of massive oak ornamented with brass rose-work, passing a litter of cardboard boxes and waste-paper basket, and in the centre the ministerial desk overladen with books and bundles, the councillor makes his way towards a bureau that he has not yet opened.

“ Perhaps it may be here,” he says, as he turns over a whole file of letters, old and new, receipts, accounts, plans and invoices — one of those mixed files put aside for future classification. Perhaps the paper had been slipped in there by mistake ? Monsieur de Pontivy set to work methodically, turning the papers over one by one, stopping here and there to read a word that caught his attention, or threw a sudden light on things long forgotten, and awakened projects long dormant.

“ Oh ! I must think over that,” he exclaimed, as he put one or another aside.

Now and again a ray of joy lit up his countenance, as he thought he had found the missing paper, and as disappointment followed he renewed the search with unabated ardour.



For more than half an hour he went on thus, seeking the lost document, a lawyer's opinion recently received, which would assist him in elucidating a difficult point which was to be secretly debated the next day in Parliament, before judgment was delivered. He had thoughtlessly let his young secretary retire without asking him the whereabouts of this document, which he alone could find.

Monsieur de Pontivy had hastened to his study this evening directly dinner was over, to mature in solitude the arguments which were to triumph on the morrow, and of which he wished to make a short, concise summary before retiring to rest.

Having returned home sooner than usual that afternoon, the fancy had seized him to advance the dinner-hour, but learning that his daughter had not returned, he was obliged to forego his whim. This hour was rarely changed, the regulations of the house being rigorous to a degree, but Monsieur de Pontivy in the excess of his despotic authority was none the less displeased, being early himself, to find no one awaiting him. So when he heard the rumbling of the heavy coach which brought back Clarisse and her governess, Mademoiselle Jusseume, he sought for a pretext to vent his ill-humour on them.

He had commenced to walk impatiently backwards and forwards the whole length of the room, casting hasty glances out of the window, wondering at the child's delay in coming to him, when the door opened and a head appeared in the doorway,

fair, with pale, delicate features, large blue eyes, wide open to the day, in whose clear depths, half-hidden by the fresh candour of first youth, lay a tinge of melancholy.

It was Clarisse.

What an apparition, in such an austere and dreary place, that frail, white-robed form standing on the threshold, a tender smile of dawn in the dark room! She entered on tip-toe, approaching her father with greeting in her eyes and on her lips; he, continuing his walk, had his back towards her.

“Already here?” she asked, and her voice fell on the silence like an angelus.

Monsieur de Pontivy turned abruptly.

“How is it that you enter without knocking?”

The smile died on the child’s lips. She murmured, disconcerted and abashed —

“I never used to knock, father, on entering your room.”

“Then make it a point to do so in future. You are no longer a child; so learn to be discreet and to respect closed doors. A closed room, mademoiselle, is a sanctuary.”

The young girl was accustomed to sermons, but had not expected one of that kind just then. She stood irresolute, hesitating whether to advance or retire.

“Must I go?” she hazarded, trembling.

Monsieur de Pontivy, satisfied at having vented

his ill-humour, stooped to kiss his daughter's forehead, and then added, as if to soften the effects of his reception —

“Where have you been to-day?”

“On the boulevards.”

“Were there many people?”

The young girl, reassured by this encouragement, began brightly —

“Oh yes, and only imagine . . . !”

“That will do! You can tell me that at table.”

But at table she was supposed only to reply to her father, and he, lost in meditation, did not question her that day. And so passed all the meals she partook of with her father and young de Robespierre, Monsieur de Pontivy's secretary, whom the councillor made welcome every day at his table, glad to have so near at hand one whose memory and aid were easily available.

Timid at first, confining himself to the points put to him, the young secretary had gradually become bolder, and sometimes, to Clarisse's great delight, would lead the conversation on to subjects of literature and art, opening out a new world before her, and shedding rays of thought in her dawning mind. She found a similar source of pleasure on Sundays in the reception-room, while Monsieur de Pontivy's attention was absorbed by his dull and solemn friends in interminable games of whist, and Robespierre entertained her apart, quickening her young dreams by the charm of an imagination at

once brilliant and graceful. It was as dew falling from heaven on her solitude.

Alas, how swiftly those hours flew! Clarisse was just sixteen. She could not remember one day of real joy. Her mother she had lost long ago; her brother Jacques, two years younger than herself, was always at school at the Collège de Navarre, and she saw him only once a fortnight, at lunch, after mass, on Sunday. At four o'clock an usher fetched him, when he had submitted his fortnight's school-work for the inspection of his father, who more often than not found fault with his efforts, so that the lad frankly confessed to his sister that, upon the whole, he preferred those Sundays on which he remained at school.

From her cradle Clarisse had been given over to nurses and chamber-maids, and at the age of eight she was confided to the care of nuns, just when she was emerging from the long torpor of childhood. Here she remained until the day when Monsieur de Pontivy, whose paternal solicitude had, up to then, been limited to taking her to the country for the holidays, claimed her, and installed her in his town residence under the charge of a governess. But Clarisse had only changed convents. For going out but seldom, except to mass and vespers on Sundays, at St. Paul's Church, or on fine days for a drive in the great coach with her governess, she continued to grow like a hot-house plant, closed in by the high walls of the house where nothing smiled,

not even the garden uncultivated and almost abandoned, nor the courtyard where a few scattered weeds pushed their way between the stones.

It is true the young girl fully made up for this in the country, during the summer months at the Château de Pontivy, two miles from Compiègne, where her father spent his holidays. But they were so short, those precious holidays! The autumn roses had scarcely unfolded when she was compelled to return with her father to Paris; and all the charm and sweetness of September, with the tender tints of its dying leaves, were unknown to her, though a semblance of its grace crept into her room sometimes in the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul, and stole like melancholy into her young soul, but new-awakened to the ideal, arousing a regret for joys denied.

These holidays were shorter since Monsieur de Pontivy recommenced his duties as councillor to the Parliament which the King had just re-established, and Clarisse began again to feel lonely, so lonely that she looked forward impatiently to the dinner-hour, when the young secretary brought with him some gay reports and rumours of Paris, planted germs of poetry in her soul, and initiated her into those charming trifles which constitute fashionable life.

All her suppressed tenderness and affection, which asked nothing better than to overflow, were concentrated on her governess, Mademoiselle Jusseume, an excellent creature, upright and generous,

but impulsive, inconsequent, and without authority. She was a good Catholic, and saw that her charge scrupulously observed her religious duties. She kept her place, was submissive, discreet, and always contented ; and this was more than enough to satisfy Monsieur de Pontivy, who classed all womankind in one rank, and that the lowest.

Of his two children the one in whom Monsieur de Pontivy took the greater interest was his son, the heir to his name, and to whom would descend later on the office of councillor. But as this was as yet a distant prospect, he contented himself with superintending his education as much as possible, absorbed as he was in high functions which he fulfilled with that perseverance and assiduity, that desire to give incessant proofs of staunch fidelity, which arise from an immeasurable pride.

Such a character can well be imagined. Heartless, hard, and implacable, strictly accomplishing his duty, honest to a fault, making ever an ostentatious display of his principles, doing no man harm, but also suffering no man to harm him, under an apparent coldness he masked an excess of violence that the least suspicion or provocation would arouse.

Clarisse had her black-letter days — days of scolding, when with eyes brimful of tears she retired to her room, forbidden even to seek refuge with her governess ; and looking back through the mists of childhood, she endured again those terrible scenes of anger, the horror of which haunted her still.

The two women understood each other instinctively, almost without the aid of words, living as they did that sequestered existence, in constant communion, both losing themselves in the same vague dreams, trembling on the borders of the unknown; each leaning on the other, with this only difference that Clarisse with an indefinable feeling of dawning force took the lead.

The same dim future smiled on both, the same far-off paradise of delusive hopes in which they would gladly lose themselves, until Mademoiselle Jusseume, suddenly conscious of responsibility, would rouse herself, blushing and trembling, as if at some guilty thought. For in their day-dreams Monsieur de Pontivy had no part, did not exist. Was he to disappear? Was he to die? In any case he was always absent from these speculations, and Mademoiselle Jusseume, the soul of righteousness, felt that this was altogether wrong.

“You must love your father,” she would say, as if stirred by some secret impulse, and the remark fell suddenly and unexpectedly on the silence of the little room where the two were apparently deeply absorbed in the mazy dancing of the flies.

“But I do love him!” Clarisse would answer without surprise, as if replying to some inner thought.

She was, indeed, convinced of it, poor child! Filial love beamed in her eyes, love for her father: a mixture of respect for his age and position, and of

gratitude for his rare kindnesses, while he did not realise the gulf that separated him from his daughter, a gulf which a little tenderness, an occasional response, a smile however slight, might have sufficed to bridge. He did not realise the riches of this mine, or seek its treasures of youth, of grace, and of love abounding in every vein. He had but to bend down, look into her large blue eyes, those eyes where the dreams floated, to find a world of love.

However, he had other things to think about; Monsieur de Pontivy, King's Councillor to the ancient Parliament, and unanimously returned to the new; a man of position, rich, influential, highly connected, of the old provincial noblesse, admitted to the council of the King, honoured at Court, respected in the town, feared at home by a whole crowd of cringing lackeys trembling before this potentate of fortune and intellect, who seemed to them the very embodiment of justice. His daughter, indeed! He had three years before him to think of her, which meant in his acceptance of the term but a speedy riddance of her, to his own and her best advantage, a chance to establish her well in the world in which he moved, in which his position would enable him to procure for her without much difficulty an alliance worthy of her name and rank. Meanwhile he was happy, or rather contented with his lot. Had not the young King but lately said to him, when he was admitted to a private audience to



render homage and tender his assurances of fidelity and respect to the successor of Louis XV. :—

“Monsieur de Pontivy, I know the services you have rendered to France, and I can only ask you to continue them.”

These words had spread through Versailles. The Councillor was overwhelmed with compliments of the kind more acceptable to certain natures for the spice of envy they contain, for is not the envy of our fellows the very sign and seal of our success?

Thus the influential Abbé de Saint-Vaast, the future Cardinal de Rohan, remarked to him some days after, whilst walking in the suite of the Queen at Versailles, “Such words, Monsieur de Pontivy, stand you in better stead than sealed parchment.”

A smile of superiority, which he quickly changed to one of patronising condescension, played round the Councillor’s lips at the thought that for a Rohan to compliment him meant that he sought something in return. Monsieur de Pontivy was not mistaken. The Abbé de Saint-Vaast wished to place with some lawyer in search of a secretary a young man who, having finished his college studies, intended to prepare for the Bar.

“I can recommend him,” said the Abbé, “as intelligent, industrious, and of an excellent character; one of the best pupils of Louis-le-Grand, and recently chosen as most worthy the honour of welcoming the King and Queen, who visited the college on their way to the Pantheon.”

“And his name?” asked Monsieur de Pontivy.

“Maximilien de Robespierre.”

“And may I ask your lordship’s reason for the particular interest taken in this young man?”

“Why, yes, of course! He comes from Arras, and was commended to me by the bishop of that town, with excellent testimonials from a priest of my diocese. I gave him a grant for the college, and as he has succeeded so far, I shall be glad to see him make his way. And, after all, are we not generally interested in the welfare of those we have helped — a feeling which you doubtless understand, Monsieur de Pontivy, since it is but human?”

“I understand it so well that I will take your nominee.”

“Into your own service?”

“Yes, into my service. Pray do not thank me. I was in urgent need of one, and am too glad to accept him on your recommendation.”

It was true, for Monsieur de Pontivy with his manifold occupations was at the moment without a secretary, and anxious to fill up the post so soon as he could find a worthy candidate. The offer of the Abbé was doubly acceptable to him as an opportunity to oblige a Rohan, and to enlist in his service a young man who had been chosen before all his fellow-students as most worthy to welcome the King and Queen.

The next day Robespierre was installed at the Hôtel de Pontivy. After some preliminary ques-

tions as to his parentage, his studies, his college life, Monsieur de Pontivy had adroitly brought the conversation to bear on the visit of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette. The young man gave a detailed account, standing in a respectful attitude, his eyes lowered, and with an appearance of modesty, which to a mind less vain than that of Monsieur de Pontivy's would have suggested more self-sufficiency than was desirable.

"And the King, what did he say? And the Queen?"

"Their majesties did not speak to me," said the young man, rather confused.

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsieur de Pontivy, visibly satisfied.

"But the King smiled," continued Robespierre, "and received me graciously."

"And the Queen?"

The young man hesitated, but drawing himself up resolutely under the searching glance of the Councillor, he answered—

"Her Majesty was equally gracious."

But he was not telling the truth, for the Queen's thoughts had been bent all the time on hastening her departure. Monsieur de Pontivy examined the young man critically. He was dressed with the utmost simplicity, but a certain air of distinction was apparent in his whole person and manners. Spruce and neat in appearance, sprightly and brisk in manner, and at the same time respectful, decision

of character and firm will were written on his brow ; his eyes of a pale green were restless and piercing, though their gleam under the gaze of others was veiled, and so subdued as to lend to the whole countenance an unexpected tenderness.

“The young man is not so bad after all,” mused Monsieur de Pontivy, and he thought he was justified in admitting him to his table now and again. Had he not been honoured with a royal glance ? He could by no means be looked upon as a chance comer.

A chance comer he certainly was not, as Monsieur de Pontivy soon discovered by his work, quick, neat, perfectly accurate and orderly, and his method in arrangement and classification, rare in a young man of his years. Pursuing his law studies, he was naturally interested in the difficult and delicate questions which Monsieur de Pontivy had so often to treat, elucidating them under his direction, and astonishing him sometimes by his sagacious remarks, in which were revealed a rare instinct for solving legal subtleties.

There is a certain kinship of the mind, a certain intellectual affinity, which creates sympathy between those who may be separated by a wide social gulf. They certainly were so separated, this master and his secretary : the one jéalously asserting his prerogative, proud of his name, of that *noblesse de robe* of which he was one of the ornaments, and which, seeing its growing influence on the destinies of

France, he had exalted to the highest rank; the other of doubtful origin, hesitating even to make use of the titular prefix of nobility, but shrewd and ambitious, and seeking to supply his deficiencies of birth in the reflected light of the patrician world.

For, after all, who were the *de* Robespierres? The tangled narrative of the young man had but half satisfied Monsieur de Pontivy. There was, first and foremost, his father, who left his four children, when mad with grief at the loss of his wife, and disappeared in Germany in most mysterious fashion. But was young Robespierre responsible for all this misty past?

That which pleased Monsieur de Pontivy most in his young secretary were his orderly habits and his method of classifying and arranging everything to hand. So continuing that evening to look for the report he wanted, he had hesitated to wake him. He had seemed so sleepy before going to bed, and it was the first time a document had not been forthcoming. The Councillor had looked everywhere — on the files, under the blotters, and even in the waste-paper basket. Had the young fellow thrown it in the fire by mistake? Naturally distrustful, suspicions began gradually to form in his mind. Had Robespierre made use of it? Had he given it to an attorney? Once doubting Monsieur de Pontivy did not rest. Had he sold it? Yes, perhaps sold it to the counsel for the adverse party! Everything is possible! One is never sure. . . . At

any rate he would ease his mind and ascertain at once. Monsieur de Pontivy looked at his watch.

“Three o’clock! So you have kept me up till this hour, my fine fellow! Now it is your turn!”

He took down a candlestick, lighted it at one of the chandeliers, and went towards the door. The whole house was wrapped in sleep. Oh! the awful stillness of that vast house, where not a soul seemed to breathe, that house with its interminable corridors, so high and so cold, like long, deserted lanes. Thus alone, in the silence of the night, he experienced a new sense of satisfaction, for was not the house absolutely his? Every living occupant, man or beast, was at his bidding, under his sway; and at this hour, when all slept under his protection, his proprietorship was accentuated, and he realised to the full that he was absolute master. In his long flowered dressing-gown, holding the candlestick aloft in his right hand, with his iron-grey head, clean-shaven visage, and true judge’s nose, large and massive as if hewn in one piece, and in keeping with the cold, hard expression of his countenance, he could have been taken for the spirit of avenging justice, or for some statue, descended from its pedestal to carry light into the surrounding darkness.

Monsieur de Pontivy crossed a long passage, turned to the left, then went up three steps, and turning again, found himself on a narrow staircase leading to the second floor. It was there that the young secretary slept, in a little room looking on

the courtyard. He lifted the candle to assure himself he was not mistaken, then knocked softly, twice. Receiving no answer he knocked again, somewhat louder.

“He sleeps soundly enough,” he muttered; “at that age it comes easy.”

The Councillor was on the point of returning. After all, it would be time enough to speak of the paper at breakfast, and already day was beginning to break. But again those subtle, insinuating suspicions crept into his mind. Yes! he must assure himself at once! And he knocked again, this time almost pushing the door. It was not fastened, and gave way, disclosing an empty room and a bed untouched. With a rapid glance he searched the room. All was in order.

“What!” he exclaimed, “at his age! This is promising, certainly.”

And he began to wonder which servant was accessory to these midnight rambles, for this was surely not the first. The hall door was barred and double-barréd when young Robespierre took leave of Monsieur de Pontivy. The porter was certainly culpable. Yes, the whole domestic staff was privy to the misconduct of his secretary! The very next day the Councillor would have a reckoning with them all, and it would be a terrible reckoning! But just at that moment, when Monsieur de Pontivy was about to leave the room, he noticed the young man’s hat and stick lying near. He stopped in surprise.

Was Robespierre in the house, then?

Monsieur de Pontivy again looked at the bed. No, it had not been slept in. Other details struck him: the coat and vest hanging up, and the frilled waistcoat carefully folded on a chair. It was enough, — the young man had not gone out.

Where was he? In Louison's room, undoubtedly, on the third floor! Louison, his daughter's maid! She was from Perigord, sprightly and complaisant, cunning enough, a veritable *soubrette*, with her sly ways and her round cheeks. Ah! how stupid he had been to have taken her into the house, considering her age and bearing, scarcely twenty-two, and dark and passionate as a Catalonian.

"I ought to have known as much," he said.

His daughter's waiting-woman! The thought was distracting. That she should enter Clarisse's room every morning, carry her breakfast, see her in bed, assist at each detail of her toilet, fresh from the young man's embraces, his caresses still warm on her lips! And these things were taking place under his roof!

He left the room agitated but resolved. It was very simple. To-morrow she would be discharged the first thing, and he also should be turned out, the hypocrite who, with all his smiling, respectful airs, defiled his roof. He did well to get himself protected by priests, and Monsieur de Rohan, a nice present he had made!

All the young man's qualities, all the satisfaction



he had given him, disappeared before this one brutal fact. He would not be sorry, either, to be able to say to the Abbé de Saint-Vaast —

“You know the young man you recommended me. Well, I surprised him in the garret with a servant-maid, and I turned him out like a lackey. But even lackeys respect my house.”

He had now crossed the corridor and was descending the stairs, still rehearsing the scene in his mind. Smarting under his wounded self-love, he exaggerated everything. Had they not forgotten the respect due to him, Monsieur de Pontivy, to his house, and worse still, had they not mockingly set him at defiance? He smiled grimly at the thought. He had now reached the last step of the second staircase, and was turning into the corridor of the ground floor.

“Decidedly,” he muttered, “I was mistaken in my estimate of that young man. He is a fool!”

All at once he stopped. He caught the sound of whispering, and the noise of a door being softly and cautiously closed. Some one here, at this hour! Who can it be? He blew out the candle, and gliding along the wall, he approached, but suddenly recoiled, for in the grey light of the dawn he had recognised Robespierre. The young man was advancing quietly in the direction of the stairs.

The truth, all the awful, maddening truth, the endless shame and dishonour, rushed on Monsieur de Pontivy in a moment, and stunned him like a blow.

Robespierre had come from Clarisse's room!

Everything swam before him. He held in his hand the extinguished candle, with such force that the bronze candlestick entered his flesh. He made a movement as if to use it as a weapon, and kill the wretch there and then. At that instant the young man saw him. He turned deadly pale and tried to escape, but Monsieur de Pontivy threw himself on him, and seized him by the throat.

"Where do you come from?" he almost hissed.

The young man swayed with the shock, his knees bent under him.

Monsieur de Pontivy, mad with rage, repeated —  
"Where do you come from?"

He was strangling him.

Robespierre gave a hoarse scream.

"You are hurting me!" he gasped.

"Hurting you! Hurting you! did you say? What if I kill you, knock out your cursed brains with this" — brandishing the bronze candlestick — "yes, kill you, wretch, for bringing dishonour on my house. . . ."

But just then Monsieur de Pontivy felt a hand laid on his arm arresting the blow.

It was Clarisse, drawn by the noise, half-dressed, her hair hanging in disorder down her back.

"Oh, father!" she sobbed, falling on her knees, as if for pardon.

It was dishonour, yes, dishonour complete, palpable, avowed, dishonour that flowed with his

daughter's tears, and covered her face with shame. The agony of the father was augmented by that of the head of the family, whose record of austerity and uprightness was thus dragged in the mud.

The young man, having regained his self-possession, was about to speak, but Monsieur de Pontivy gave him no time.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Not a word! Do you hear, sir? Not a word! To your room, and await my orders!"

The command was accompanied with such a gesture that Robespierre could only obey, and silently moved towards the staircase.

Then, turning towards Clarisse, he continued, "As to you . . ."

But she lay lifeless on the floor. He bent down, lifted her in his arms, and carried her to her room; exhausted by her weight, he laid her on the first arm-chair.

The young girl regained consciousness. She opened her eyes and recognised her father, and a sob rose in her throat, suffocating her. She could not speak, but a word she had not pronounced for ten years, a word from her far-off childhood, came to her lips, and she murmured softly through her tears, "Papa! papa!"

## CHAPTER II

### THE VOICE OF THE PAST

UNDER what irresistible spell had she fallen? Through what intricate windings had the subtle poison entered the young girl's pure and innocent soul, then steeped in the fresh dew of life's dawning hopes? What sweet vision had the young man held out to her, to which she had yielded in all innocence, her eyes dreamily fixed on the vague unknown, and from which she had awaked, all pale and trembling, her heart smitten with unspeakable dismay?

Or had they both been the puppets of Destiny, of blind Chance which at so tender an age had brought them together under the same roof, in an intimacy of daily intercourse, increased by the sadness of their cloistered existence, so that they had been the victims of their extreme youth, of the attraction they unconsciously exercised over each other, both carried away by the strong currents of life.

She, influenced by a train of incidents insignificant in themselves, rendered dangerous by repetition, details of every-day life which had gradually drawn her towards the young man, whose presence at last became a sweet necessity to her lonely existence.

He, suddenly stirred during the first few days of his residence in the Hôtel Rue des Lions; never for a moment thinking of the distance which separated him from the daughter of Monsieur de Pontivy. Think? How could he think, thrilling under the first revelation of love disclosed to him with the eloquence of Rousseau in *la Nouvelle Héloïse*, that romance of burning passion then in vogue? He had commenced to read the novel, by stealth, at Louis-le-Grand, and finished it in three nights of mad insomnia, in his little room on the third floor at the Hôtel de Pontivy. All the sap of his youth beat at his temples and throbbed in his veins at that flaming rhetoric; every phrase burned like kisses on his lips.

He recited portions aloud, learned them by heart, found them sublime in utterance. He yearned to repeat them to others, as one does music. And to whom could he repeat them but to Clarisse, placed there as if expressly to hear them? So he did repeat them to her. At all times and everywhere when alone with her. At the harpsichord, on long winter evenings, when the guests gravely and silently played at cards, and he turned the pages of her music. Out walking, when he met her, as if by chance, and spoke to her—while the eyes of Mademoiselle Jusseaume wandered absently from them—of Paris which she knew so little, the gay *fêtes* and gossip of the town, thus opening out to her endless vistas of happiness until then unknown, which involved promises of future joy.

He recited verses to her, pastorals, such as were then upon men's lips, mythologic madrigals made for rolling round a bonbon. She found them charming, and sought to learn them by heart. He copied them and gave them to her. This was a dangerous game. He became bolder, copied love-letters, then wrote them himself and compared them with Rousseau's. She read them, delighted at first, then trembling, and when she trembled it was too late.

She was unconsciously dragged into a world of fancy and illusion by the very strength of his youth and enthusiasm. His presence in that dull dwelling had seemed a ray of sunlight under which the bud of her young life had opened into flower. Thus, all unconscious of the poisonous mist that was more closely enveloping her from day to day, she found herself gliding insensibly down a steep declivity which gave way under her feet as she advanced, and before she could recover possession of her senses, or stay her quick descent to question whereto it led, she was undone!

"Every girl who reads this book is lost," Rousseau had written at the beginning of *la Nouvelle Héloïse*. And she had done far worse. Alone, given up to her own devices, just awakening to the mystery of existence, pure, innocent, and guileless, she had imbibed its insidious poison from the lips of one she had learned to love. And now she had fallen from these dizzy heights, dazed and crushed,

lonelier than ever, for Monsieur de Pontivy had turned Robespierre out of the house soon after the fatal discovery.

The decision had been brief, in the character of a command :

“Of course, it is understood that what passed between us last night shall go no further,” Monsieur de Pontivy had said to the young secretary, called to the Councillor’s study at breakfast-time. “You can seek some pretext to treat me disrespectfully at table before the servants, and I shall beg you to leave my house.”

The young man listened respectfully.

“But I am willing to make reparation,” he said.

The Councillor drew back under this new affront.

“You marry my daughter ! You forget who you are, Monsieur de Robespierre ! You, the husband of Mademoiselle de Pontivy ! Enough, sir, and do as I have said !”

The departure of young Robespierre took place as the Councillor desired. No one had the slightest suspicion of the real reason, and Clarisse, who was suffering from a severe attack of brain fever, kept her bed.

In refusing to give the hand of his daughter, even dishonoured, to any one who was not of her rank, Monsieur de Pontivy was but true to his principles, to his own code of morals, based upon caste prejudice and foolish pride.

Could he have read the future of the young man

he would not have acted otherwise, and yet that young man was destined to become one of the masters of France — but at what a price and under what conditions!

Nineteen years had passed since then, nineteen years in which events succeeded each other with a rapidity and violence unparalleled in the previous history of Europe. The excesses of an arbitrary government, added to universal discontent, had led to the Revolution. But this act of deliverance and social regeneration was unhappily to develop even worse excesses. The Reign of Terror was now raging. Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette had perished on the scaffold, followed by a large number of nobles and priests, victims of the tempest now at flood, and drowning in its crimson tide numberless victims with no respect of persons. The whole nation, in the country and in Paris, was perishing in the iron grasp of a new and more despotic government. Terror, monstrous parody of liberty, ruled the State, which was adrift without rudder on the storm, while all its people were driven to distraction by wild advocates of the guillotine.

Prominent among these fanatics, raised to power by the very suddenness of events, was Maximilien de Robespierre, once the young secretary of Monsieur de Pontivy, now styled simply Robespierre, President of the National Assembly, or Convention, the most powerful and most dreaded of the twelve



*conventionnels* who, under the name of members of the Committee of Public Safety, ruled the destinies of France.

History is the romance of nations, more abundant in wild improbabilities than the most extravagant fairy tale; and the French Revolution stands out from the events which have perplexed the mind of man since the world began, a still unsolved enigma. The actors in this fearful drama move like beings of some other sphere, the produce of a wild imagination, the offspring of delirium, created to astound and stupefy. And it was the destiny of the secretary of Monsieur de Pontivy to become one of these. Still in the prime of his life, scarcely thirty-six, he was one of the principal if not the chief personage of the Revolution.

However signal his success, the course of events left him unchanged. During the slow accession of a man to the summit of human aspiration, his deficiencies are sometimes dwarfed and his powers developed and strengthened; but the foundation remains the same — just as trees which ever renew their leaves, and absorb from the same soil a perennial flow of life.

After nineteen years, marked by a succession of events so rapid, so tumultuous, and of such moment that they would have sufficed to fill a century of history, the secretary of Monsieur de Pontivy, whom we last saw awake to love under the influence of Rousseau, found himself, on a day given up to re-

tirement and study, at *l'Ermitage* of Montmorency, in the very room where the great philosopher wrote *la Nouvelle Héloïse*, whose burning pages had been a revelation to his youth.

He had come there to seek inspiration for the speech he was to deliver on the Place de la Révolution at the approaching festival in honour of the Supreme Being, a ceremony instituted and organised under his direction, and which had been suggested to him by the spiritualistic theories of Rousseau.

It was Friday, the 6th of June, 1794, or, to use the language of the time, the 20th *prairial* of the second year of the Republic. Robespierre, having left Paris the evening before, had come down to sleep in that quiet and flowery retreat, built at the entrance of the forest of Montmorency, like a nest hidden in the under branches of a tree. Rousseau's *Ermitage*, which became State property after the Revolution, had been secretly sublet to him by a friend and given over to the care of a gardener, who also acted as sole domestic during his visits, which were very frequent. For he often fled from Paris secretly, seeking solitude and calm, and a little of that poetry of nature in which the fiercest Revolutionists, his peers in crime, loved sometimes to refresh themselves in the short pauses of their fratricidal and sanguinary struggles.

Robespierre descended to the garden soon after daybreak, inhaling the fresh morning air, wandering under the shade of those great trees where

Rousseau used to walk, or sitting in his favourite nooks; dreaming the while, his soul drinking to the full the infinite sweetness of Nature's magic charms, quickened into life at the rosy touch of morn. He would busy himself in rustic pursuits, botanising, or gathering periwinkles, the master's favourite flowers; thus occupied he used to prolong his walk into the forest of Montmorency, which seemed but a continuation of the garden. Here, he would sometimes find friends awaiting him, an intimate circle which he was wont to gather round him to share a rustic meal upon the grass.

That morning he had awakened earlier than usual, beset with ideas for his forthcoming speech, the first that he was to deliver at a public ceremony, whose anticipated success would, like an apotheosis, deify him in the eyes of the people, and set a decisive and brilliant seal to that supremacy of power which was the goal of his boundless ambition. It was important that he should finish before noon, when he had arranged an interview in the forest, a political interview of the highest importance, which would perhaps effect a change in the foreign policy of France.

Robespierre had slept in the very room which Rousseau had occupied on the first floor, and in which were gathered all the furniture and possessions of the great man, left behind in the haste of removal, after his famous quarrel with the fair

owner of *l'Ermitage*. The bed was Rousseau's, as were two walnut cabinets and a table of the same rich wood, the very table on which the philosopher wrote the first part of *la Nouvelle Héloïse*; then a small library, a barometer, and two pictures, one of which, by an English painter, represented "The Soldier's Fortune," and the other "The Wise and Foolish Virgins." In these surroundings Robespierre seemed to breathe more intimately the spirit of the master for whom he had such an ardent admiration.

Robespierre had passed a sleepless night, judging from his pale, feverish face and swollen eyelids. Outwardly he was little changed. Monsieur de Pontivy would have recognised his former secretary in this man before whom all France trembled. It was the same dapper figure, spruce and neat as ever, with that nervous, restless manner which time had but accentuated. This nervousness, apparent in his whole person, was visible even in his face, which, now deeply marked with small-pox, twitched and contracted convulsively. The high cheek-bones and the green, cat-like eyes, shifting about in an uneasy fashion, added to the unpleasant expression of the whole countenance.

He threw open the three windows of his room, which looked out on the garden. A whiff of fresh air fanned his face, charged with all the sweet perfumes of the country. Day had scarcely dawned, and the whole valley of Montmorency was bathed

in pale, uncertain light, like floating mist. He remained at one of the windows, gazing long and earnestly out on awakening nature, watching the dawn as it slowly lifted the veil at the first smiles of morning. Then he seated himself at the little table prepared for work, with sheets of paper spread about, as if awaiting the thoughts of which they were to be the messengers. He slipped his pen in an inkstand ornamented with a small bust of Rousseau, and commenced.

Jotting down some rough notes and sentences, he stopped to look out of the window in a dreamy, absent manner, apparently without thought. Thirty-five years ago, amid the same surroundings, in that same room, on that very table, Rousseau had written those burning pages of romance under whose influence Robespierre had stammered forth his first love tale on the shoulder of Clarisse. Did he ever think of that drama of his youth, of that living relic of his sin wandering about the world perhaps, his child, the fruit of his first love, whose advent into life Clarisse had announced to him some months after the terrible scene at the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul? Think? He had more important things to trouble him! Think indeed! The idea had never entered his head. For many years the intellectual appetite had alone prevailed in him; — egoism, and that masterful ambition which asks no other intoxicant than the delirium of success, and the thought of realising one day, by terrorism even if necessary,

Utopian theories of universal equality. And yet the letter in which Clarisse had apprised him of her approaching motherhood would have moved a stone: —

“DEAR MAXIMILIEN, — I never thought to write to you after the solemn promise torn from me by my father, the day he declared I should never be your wife. An unexpected event releases me from my oath, and brings me nearer to you.

“I am about to become a mother.

“My father knows this. I thought that the announcement would conquer his resistance, but I was mistaken. My supplications were vain.

“He persists unshaken in his refusal, exasperated at my entreaties, and is resolved to send me to a convent, where the innocent being whose life is already considered a crime will first see the light. My heart bleeds at the thought of the wide gulf that must separate you from your child, orphaned before its birth. And what pain for you to have a child that you must never know! But I will spare you this. You are the disposer of our destiny, Maximilien. We are yours.

“I have some money saved, which, in addition to the kind help of Mademoiselle Jusseaume, would enable us to cross to England, where a priest of our faith will bless our union. We can return afterwards to France, if you wish; that shall be as you judge best, for you will have no wife more submissive and devoted than the mother of your child.

“I am sending this letter to your aunt’s at Arras, requesting them to forward it to you. Write to me at the Poste Restante, Rue du Louvre, under the name of the kind-hearted Mademoiselle Jus-seaume, who is reading over my shoulder while I write, her eyes full of tears. Wherever I may be, your reply will always reach me.

“I kiss thee from my soul, dear companion of my heart — that heart which through all its sufferings burns with an undying love and is thine forever.

“CLARISSE DE PONTIVY.”

This letter remained unanswered. Had it reached its destination? Yes; young Robespierre had actually received it, eight days after, in Paris, at the Hôtel du Coq d’Argent, on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, where he had hired a room after leaving Monsieur de Pontivy’s house. He had read and re-read Clarisse’s letter, then, on consideration, he burnt it, so that no trace of it should be left. Clarisse’s proposal was a risky adventure. What would become of them both in England when her meagre resources were exhausted? Return to France? Implore Monsieur de Pontivy’s pardon? A fine prospect! He would cause the marriage to be annulled, for it was illegal both in England and in France, as the young people were not of age. As to him, his fate was sealed in advance. He would be sent to the Bastille. And the child? He scarcely gave a thought to it. So much might happen before its birth!

This, however, was made known to him, soon after, in another letter from Clarisse. The child — a boy — was born. If he did not decide to take them the child would be abandoned, and she sent to a convent. Robespierre hesitated, crushing the letter between his fingers, then resolutely burnt it, as he destroyed the first. Paugh! The grandfather was wealthy. The child would not starve. Clarisse had told him that she had given him Monsieur de Pontivy's Christian name — Olivier. The Councillor would eventually relent. And was it not, after all, one of those adventures of common occurrence in the life of young men? He, at least, had done his duty by offering to make reparation by marriage. Monsieur de Pontivy would not hear of it. So much the worse!

Ah! he was of mean birth, was he! — without ancestry, without connections, without a future. . . . Without a future? Was that certain, though?

Monsieur de Pontivy's refusal, far from humiliating him, gave a spur to his ambition. All his latent self-esteem and pride rose suddenly in one violent outburst. Full of bitterness and wounded vanity he finished his law studies in a sort of rage, and set out for Arras, his native place, which he had left as a child, returning to it a full-fledged lawyer. No sooner was he called to the Bar than he came into public notice, choosing the cases most likely to bring him renown.

But these local triumphs, however flattering,



only half-satisfied his ambition. He cared little or nothing for provincial fame. He would be also foremost in the ranks of those who followed with anxious interest the great Revolutionary movement now astir everywhere, in the highways and byways of France, with its train of new ideas and aspirations. Robespierre took part in this cautiously and adroitly, reserving ample margin for retreat in case of future surprises, but already foreseeing the brilliant career that politics would thenceforth offer to ambition.

At the Convocation of the States-General, the young lawyer was sent to Versailles to represent his native town. Success was, at length, within his grasp. He was nearing the Court, and about to plunge into the whirl of public affairs, in which he thought to find an avenue to his ambition.

And yet he did not succeed all at once. Disconcerted, he lost command of himself, became impatient and excited by extreme nervousness. He had developed such tendencies even at Arras, and time seemed only to increase them. In the chamber of the States-General, still ringing with the thunderous eloquence of Mirabeau, the scene of giant contests of men of towering mental stature, Robespierre vainly essayed to speak. He was received with mockery and smiles of ridicule. He appeared puny and grotesque to these colossal champions of Liberty, with his falsetto voice, his petty gestures, his nervous twitches and grimaces, more like a monkey who had lost a nut than a man.

But Robespierre's colleagues would have ceased their raillery perhaps had they gone deeper into the motives and character of the man, and sounded the subtle intricacies of his soul. They would have found in those depths a resolute desire to accomplish his aim, an insatiable pride joined to the confidence of an apostle determined to uphold his own doctrines, and to promote theories of absolute equality, and of a return to the ideal state of nature. They would have perhaps discovered that this ambitious fanatic was capable of anything, even of atrocious crime, to realise his dreams.

The impetuous tribune Mirabeau had said at Versailles: "That man will go far, for he believes in what he says." Mirabeau ought to have said, "He believes in himself, and, as the effect of his mad vanity, he looks upon everything he says as gospel truth." And in this lay his very strength. This was the source of his success, founded on that cult of self, and a confidence in his own powers carried to the point of believing himself infallible. Through all the jolts and jars of party strife, the thunder and lightning contests, the eager enthusiasm or gloomy despondency, the grand and tumultuous outpourings of the revolutionary volcano through all this hideous but sublime conflict, and amid dissensions of parties swarming from the four corners of France, tearing each other to pieces like wild beasts, Robespierre cunningly pursued a stealthy course, sinuously ingratiating himself now with the more

advanced, now with the more moderate, always faithful to his original plan and policy.

Words! Rhetoric! these were his arms. Speech was not incriminating, but actions were. Words were forgotten, actions lived as facts, and Robespierre kept as clear of these as possible. During the most startling manifestations of that horrible revolutionary struggle, he was never seen, though the work of his hand could be traced everywhere, for far from retiring he carried fuel to the flames, knowing well that every one would be swallowed up in the fratricidal strife. When the danger was over and victory assured, he would re-appear fierce and agitated, thus creating the illusion that he had taken part in the last battle, and suffered personally in the contest.

Where was he at the insurrection of Paris, the 10th of August, 1792, when the populace invaded the Tuileries, and hastened the fall and imprisonment of the King, whom they sent to the scaffold some months later? Where was he a few days later, the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th of September, when armed bands wandered through Paris, forcing the prison doors, and butchering the hostages? Where was he during the riots of February, 1793, when the famished populace prowled about Paris asking for bread? Where was he the evening of the 1st of May, when eighteen thousand Parisians assailed the National Convention to turn out the traitor deputies? Where was he two days after, on the 2nd of June, when the insurrection recommenced?

Hidden, immured, barricaded, walking to and fro like an encaged tiger-cat, excited and agitated, shaken with doubts, cold beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, breathless to hear any news which his agents and detectives might bring him, and only breathing freely again when the result was known.

For this man was a coward. And was this known? No! Not then! All that was known was what he wished to make public; that he was poor, that he was worthy in every respect of the title of "Incorruptible" given to him by a revolutionist in a moment of enthusiasm. And, in truth, he was free from any venal stain, and knew that in this lay the greater part of his strength.

What was also known was that he was temperate and chaste. His private life, from the time he left Versailles with the States-General to come to Paris and install himself in a humble lodging in the Rue de Saintonge, would bear the closest scrutiny. He lived there frugally and modestly, his only resource being the deputy's fees of eighteen francs a day, part of which he ostentatiously sent to his sister at Arras. Then suddenly he established himself in the house of Duplay the carpenter, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, a few steps from his club, the Jacobin Club; or, more properly speaking, he was established there by force, by the carpenter himself, an ardent admirer of his, who took advantage of a chance hospitality during the riots to press him to remain indefinitely. He occupied a room under their roof where he had

now lived a year, surrounded by the jealous care of the whole family, in republican simplicity, after the true patriarchal manner.

All this was well known, or if it had not been Robespierre would have proclaimed it, for from this Spartan setting an atmosphere of democratic virtue enveloped him, and raised him in solitary state above his fellows.

Yes, he was above them! Others gave themselves away, but he never! Others had revealed their characters in unguarded moments, and laid bare to the world their frailties and their virtues. He had never betrayed himself, for he never acted on impulse. The others were well known to be made of flesh and blood, of idealism, and dust, but who knew the real Robespierre? The very mystery and doubt in which his true character was wrapped had lent credence to the common rumour which attributed to him supernatural qualities. He was compared to the pure source, high among virgin snows, from which the Revolution sprung.

He stood alone on his pedestal, inaccessible, unassailable. All the great leaders of the Revolution, his predecessors or his rivals, had disappeared, carried off in the whirlwind, victims of their exaggerated enthusiasm, as Mirabeau and Marat, or of Robespierre's treachery, as Danton and Camille Desmoulins, ground in the sanguinary mill of the Revolutionary Tribunal, on his sole accusation.

Thus when his path was cleared of those who

stood most in his way, he anticipated the time when he should hold the destiny of France in his hand, aided by the Convention now subdued to his will, and the whole armed force grovelling at his feet.

Yet one obstacle remained to be surmounted: the Committee of Public Safety to whom the Convention had transferred its authority, and of which he was a member, but where he felt a terrible undercurrent of animosity directed against him.

At this point Robespierre realised that he must either cajole or conquer them. For if they were curbed and reduced to silence, he would have all power absolutely in his own hands. The hour was approaching. It was necessary to strike a decisive blow, and he thought to have found the means to do so, and to overawe the Committee, at his Festival of the Supreme Being, which would take place in a couple of days, when he would speak to the assembled multitude, and dominate his colleagues in his quality of President of the Convention, a post he had sought in order to have an opportunity to assert himself at this lay ceremony, this parody of the religious celebrations of the old régime.

His intention was to confirm in public, amid the acclamations of the populace, the religion of a new God, whose existence he had just proclaimed — the God of Nature, a stranger to Christianity, borrowed entire from Rousseau's famous pages in *le Vicaire Savoyard*. Robespierre's sectarian temperament experienced a deeper satisfaction than he had perhaps

ever felt, at the thought that he was to declaim, among flowers and incense, those empty, sonorous phrases which he was writing on the little walnut table where his master had found some of his most burning inspirations. He became in his own eyes the high priest of the Republic, offering incense on the altar of his own superhuman sovereignty. Yes, Robespierre could already hear the enthusiastic applause of the multitude! Who would dare to stand in his way after such public consecration in the immense Place de la Révolution, where for a week past the platform was being prepared.

Such was the man shadowed by Destiny, the further course of whose chequered career, with its startling incidents, we are now to follow.

Robespierre had just finished his first discourse, for he was to deliver two. He closed it with a menace. "People," it ran, "let us under the auspices of the Supreme Being give ourselves up to a pure joy. To-morrow we shall again take arms against vice and tyrants!"

This was his note of warning to those who, he felt, ranged themselves against him. Completely satisfied with himself, he read and re-read his sentences, stopping to polish periods and phrases, or seeking graceful and sonorous epithets. One passage especially pleased him, for a breath of *le Vicaire Savoyard* seemed to pervade it. He spoke of the presence of the Supreme Being, in all the joys of

life. "It is He," he said, "who adds a charm to the brow of beauty by adorning it with modesty; it is He who fills the maternal heart with tenderness and joy; it is He who floods with happy tears the eyes of a son clasped in his mother's arms." Robespierre smiled at the music of the phrasing which in his pedantry he thought his master would not have disowned.

But he stopped. After all, was it not a reminiscence of *le Vicaire Savoyard*? Perhaps he had made use of the same metaphor as Rousseau? He would be accused of feeble imitation! This could be easily ascertained, as the book was near at hand, in the little bookcase that once belonged to the master. He had but to take it from the case. The key was in the lock, but it resisted, though he used all his strength. Growing impatient, he was about to break open the door, but paused as though this would be sacrilege, and at last sent for the gardener.

"This lock does not act, does it?" he said.

The gardener tried it in his turn, but with no better success.

"It is of the utmost importance for me to have a book which is in there," said Robespierre, visibly annoyed.

"That can be easily managed, citizen; there is a locksmith a few steps from here, on the road to the forest. I will go and fetch his apprentice."

The gardener ran downstairs, and Robespierre returned to his work. He was soon aware of foot-



steps advancing. It was the gardener returning with the apprentice.

“This way, citizen,” said the gardener.

The two men entered. Robespierre had his back to them, and continued to write, a happy inspiration having occurred to him, which he was shaping into a sentence. After they had tried several keys the door yielded at last.

“Now it’s right, citizen!” said the gardener.

“Thanks!” said Robespierre, still bending over his work, and absorbed in his sentence.

Suddenly the sound of a voice floated up through the casement: —

“Petits oiseaux de ce vivant bocage. . . .”

It was the young apprentice returning home across the garden, singing. Robespierre stopped in his writing, vaguely surprised. He had heard that air before! But where? When? This he could not tell. It was the echo of a distant memory. He turned his head slowly in the direction of the cadence, but the song had ceased.

The fleeting impression was soon effaced, and Robespierre, having already forgotten the coincidence, rose and went towards the now open book-case. Taking Rousseau’s volume, he opened it at these words: “Is there in the world a more feeble and miserable being, a creature more at the mercy of all around it, and in such need of pity, care, and protection, as a child?” He passed over two chap-

ters, turning the pages hastily. The phrase he wanted was undoubtedly more towards the end. As one of the leaves resisted the quick action of his hand, he stopped a moment to glance at the text: "From my youth upwards, I have respected marriage as the first and holiest institution of nature . . ." Now he would find it. The phrase he wanted could not be much further! It soon cheered his sight: "I see God in all His works, I feel His presence in me, I see Him in all my surroundings."

Robespierre breathed freely again. Here was only an analogy of thought, suggested, hinted at by Rousseau, and which he, Robespierre, had more fully developed. Smiling and reassured he returned to his place.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ENGLISHMAN

THESE words of Rousseau read before the open bookcase, suggestive as they were of voices from the past still echoing through his memory, had no meaning for him. They kindled no spark in the dead embers of his conscience to reveal the truth. And yet it was a warning from heaven — a moment of grave and vital import in the life of this man, who, had he not been blinded by an insane ambition, might have recognised in the passing stranger a messenger of Fate.

For the voice which had distracted him from his work was the voice of Clarisse, and the young apprentice who had just left him was his son.

The outcast child, now grown to manhood, had been within touch of his own father, but unseen by him. No mysterious affinity had drawn them together, though the voice had vaguely troubled him as he returned to his work.

The young man on leaving *l'Ermitage* took the path that led to the forest. He was a fine, stoutly built lad, with a brisk lively manner, strong and supple, revealing in spite of his workman's garb an

air of good breeding which might have perhaps betrayed his origin to a keen observer. His hair was dark brown, his blue eyes looked out from the sun-burnt and weather-beaten face with an expression of extreme sweetness, and his full lips smiled under a downy moustache. He walked with rapid strides, a hazel stick in his hand, towards the forest, which he soon reached, threading the paths and bypaths with the assurance of one to whom the deep wood and its intricate labyrinths was familiar. He slackened his pace now and then to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, keeping to the more shady side of the way, for the sun, already high in the heavens, shed its rays in a burning shower through the leaves, scorching the very grass in its intensity. At last, overcome by the heat, he took off his coat and hung it at the end of the stick across his shoulder.

Presently he turned into an avenue of oak saplings through which a green glade was visible, an oasis where refreshing coolness told of the presence of running water. Here he shaded his eyes with his hands to make out a form outlined against the distance, and a smile lit up his face as he recognised the approaching figure. Hastening his steps he called out —

“Thérèse !”

A fresh, clear voice answered —

“Good morning, Olivier ! Good morning !” as a young girl came towards him with outstretched hands. She was tall and lithe, of a fair, rosy com-

plexion, and wore a peasant's dress from which the colour had long since faded. She advanced rapidly, now and then replacing with a quick, graceful movement the rebel locks of fair hair that caressed her cheeks, all in disorder from the air and exercise.

"You bad boy! Auntie and I have been quite anxious about you; but where do you come from?"

For only answer the young man kissed her up-turned forehead, and allowed her to take the stick at the end of which his coat still hung.

"And where is mamma?" he asked, continuing to walk on.

"Why, here, of course!" called another voice, a woman's also, gay and joyous as the other, but more mellow in tone, and Clarisse's head appeared above the tall grass.

Instantly the young man was in his mother's arms, and seated by her side on the trunk of a fallen chestnut lying parallel with the stream, which in his haste he had cleared at a bound, discarding the assistance of the little bridge of trees of which the young girl was more prudently taking advantage.

"Ah! my poor Olivier! What anxiety you have caused us! Why are you so late? And after being out all night, too?"

"Did you not know that I should not be back?" the young man asked, looking at his mother.

"Yes, but we expected you earlier this morning."

"It does certainly seem as if it had happened on purpose," he said, as he explained to them why he

was so late, and he went on to tell them how he had been kept at the last moment by his employer for some pressing work at Saint-Prix, a little village then in full gala, and distant about a league from the forest. The Democratic Society of the district had joined for this occasion with the Montmorency Society, and there were of course masts to put up, a stand to erect, or rather to improvise, for everything was behindhand. Olivier had been told off to fix iron supports to the steps raised for the convenience of the populace. They had worked, he said, till late in the night by candle light, and in the morning, when he was preparing to come home, he had to go to *l'Ermitage* to open a bookcase, just to oblige the gardener who was such a good fellow, though the tenant . . .

“Who is he?” interrupted Clarisse, always fearful and uneasy at the thought of her son going to a stranger’s house.

“I don’t know at all,” replied Olivier. “I only know that he did n’t even disturb himself to thank me. They have pretty manners, these Republicans; the old aristocracy were at least polite.”

But his mother stopped him.

“Oh, hush! Do not speak like that; suppose you were heard!”

And, putting her arms round his neck, as if to shield him from some possible danger, she asked him what news he brought from the workshop.

“Nothing but the same string of horrors at Paris,

and it was even said that the number of victims had sensibly increased."

Carried away by his subject, he detailed to the two women scraps of conversation overheard that night at the village of Saint-Prix. As he spoke, Marie Thérèse, now seated near him on the grass, with his coat spread before her, silently smoothed out the creases, and his mother drank in every word with breathless attention.

Nothing was left of the Clarisse of sixteen but the velvet softness of the blue eyes, and the sweet charm of their expression, with all the pristine freshness of a pure soul still mirrored in their depth. The thin, colourless face seemed modelled in deep furrows, and the fair hair was already shot with silver. Though poorly clad in the dress of a peasant, she also might have betrayed her better birth to a practised observer by her white hands, with tapered fingers and delicate wrists, and by the supple grace of her bearing. But who could regard as an aristocrat this poor woman, almost old, sheltering under her maternal wing the stout young workman, with his resolute air and hands blackened at the forge?

She now went under the name of Durand, as did her son and her niece, Marie Thérèse, who passed as the child of her brother-in-law. The young girl was, in reality, the daughter of her own brother, the young student of the College of Navarre, who had been killed the preceding year in Vendée, fighting in

the ranks of the Chouans, in the Royalist cause. Clarisse's husband also met his fate at one of these sanguinary combats, for he was so dangerously wounded that a few days after he had been secretly conveyed to London he died in great agony.

For Clarisse had been married, and was now a widow.

And her past: it could be written in a page — a little page; yet in writing it her hand would have trembled at every line. Deserted by her betrayer, receiving no reply to her letters, she realised, when too late, his cold egoism and ambition. She had been separated from her child, who was born in the retirement of a little village of Dauphiné, whither her father had taken her, and had been immediately confided to the care of peasants, where she was allowed to visit him once a fortnight, subject to a thousand precautions imposed by Monsieur de Pontivy.

And yet, with all this weight of sadness, Clarisse retained her native grace. Misfortune had but added charm to her delicate and melancholy beauty.

It sometimes happened, though very seldom, that she was obliged to accompany her father into society. On one of these rare occasions she attracted the notice of a young captain of the Queen's Guards, Monsieur de Mauluçon, who sought her society assiduously, fell in love with her, and asked Monsieur de Pontivy for her hand.



“Your offer does us much honour,” the Councillor had replied, “but I should wish you to see Mademoiselle de Pontivy herself, before renewing your request to me.”

And Monsieur de Pontivy notified the fact to Clarisse the same evening with characteristic formality :

“Monsieur de Mauluçon,” he said, “whose affection, it appears, you have won, has done me the honour of asking for your hand. I gave him to understand that you alone would dispose of it. He will be here to-morrow afternoon to confer with you. I do not know if he pleases you, but this I know, that if you wish to accept his offer you must lay before him the story of your past. And I need not tell you that if, after this, he persists in making you his wife, you can rely on my consent.”

“It shall be as you wish, father,” Clarisse answered.

That open nature, which was her most touching trait, made her father's attitude seem quite natural. She did not wait to think that Monsieur de Pontivy could have spared her the shame of this avowal by making it himself, for the fault of another is more easily confessed than our own. Clarisse only felt that, having inflicted a wrong on her father, she was in duty bound to expiate it. And, in truth, it did not cost her so much to make the confession to Monsieur de Mauluçon as it would to have broken

it to any other, for he had from the first inspired her with unbounded confidence. She had read a manly generosity in the kindly expression of his frank, open face. She would never have dreamt of becoming his wife, but since he had offered himself why not accept the proffered support of so strong an arm? She well knew in her lonely existence that her father would never be the loving friend and protector that, in the utter weakness of her betrayed and blighted womanhood, she had yearned for through so many long days!

But her child, her little Olivier, would he be an obstacle? At the thought her eyes filled with tears. What did it matter? She would only love him the more, the angel, and suffering would but bind them closer together! However, it was now to be decided, and both their destinies would be sealed, for she well knew that if Monsieur de Mauluçon drew back after her confession, all prospects of marriage would be over, for never again could she so humiliate herself, though she could bring herself to it now, for she had read a deep and tender sympathy in her lover's eyes. And, after all, what mattered it if she were not his wife? She would at least remain worthy of his pity, for he could not despise her. Her confession would create a tie between them which he would perhaps remember later on, when her little Olivier engaged in the battle of life.

When Monsieur de Mauluçon came again to her,

innocent of all suspicion, he found her grave and deeply moved. In a few brief words she laid bare to him the history of her past, and he was too high-souled, too strong and generous, to feel anything but an immense pity for a heart of exquisite sensibility, wrecked by its own confiding impulses, misunderstood, misled, and then forsaken.

He took both her hands in his and pressed them to his lips respectfully.

“And the child,” he said; “whose name does he bear?”

“Luc-Olivier. Olivier is my father’s Christian name.”

“But he must have a name! We will give him ours. Mauluçon is as good as Pontivy.”

“How can that be?” Clarisse answered, thinking she must be dreaming. “Do you mean you will adopt my child? . . . Oh! Monsieur! . . . Monsieur! . . .” and she stammered incoherent words of gratitude, struggling with an emotion which seemed to strangle her.

“I also have a Christian name” — and he bent low, whispering softly in her ear — “my name is Maurice.”

She turned towards him with a wan smile, and as he stooped to kiss his affianced bride she melted into tears.

The child was just two years old. The young couple took him with them in their travels. They then established themselves at Pontivy, near the

grandfather, who had softened towards his daughter since her marriage, partly won by the baby charm of his grandchild. Their visits to Paris became less frequent, for Monsieur de Mauluçon, in order better to enjoy his home life, obtained an unlimited leave of absence. He now devoted himself to Olivier's education, who was growing up a bright, frank, and affectionate boy. Except Monsieur de Pontivy and Clarisse's brother Jacques, no one but themselves knew the story of his birth. Jacques de Pontivy, recently married, had kept it even from his wife, who died, however, some months after giving birth to a baby girl, whom Clarisse now loved as much as her own Olivier.

Life seemed to smile at last upon the poor woman, when the Revolution broke out. Jacques de Pontivy, who had intended to succeed his father in Parliament, seeing the Royal Family menaced, entered the army, which Monsieur de Mauluçon had also rejoined. Both endeavoured several times to give open proof of their loyal sentiments. They covered the flight of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, and were nearly taken at the arrest of the King and Queen on their way to Varennes, and the next year they were obliged to fly from France, and both sought refuge in England, resolved to serve the Royalist cause with all their energy and devotion to the last.

Clarisse, who had remained at Paris with her husband during those stormy times, now rejoined her

father at the Château de Pontivy, with Olivier and little Marie Thérèse.

Monsieur de Pontivy, whose health was fast failing, was struck to the heart by the rapid march of events and the sudden collapse of all his most cherished surroundings.

“There is nothing left but to die,” he would say sometimes, looking on with indifference at the vain attempts of his son and son-in-law, whose firm faith and enthusiasm he no longer understood, tired and disgusted as he was with everything.

Another tie which bound Clarisse to France was the charge of the two children. Almost grown up now, they were still too young to be exposed to the danger of travelling in such uncertain times, when the frontiers were scarcely guarded, and France was committed to a course which had estranged her from the nations of Europe.

But when Clarisse heard that Monsieur de Mau-luçon and her brother were on the eve of leaving London for Southampton to rejoin the royal army in Vendée, she hesitated no longer.

Confiding the children to their grandfather's care, she left Pontivy, and arrived in London, to find her husband and brother at the house of a mutual friend, Benjamin Vaughan, whose acquaintance they had made at the American Embassy in Paris, at a reception on the anniversary of the United States Independence, and with whom they had become intimate.

But Clarisse had hardly rejoined her husband,

when a letter reached her from Pontivy telling her that if she wished to hear her father's last words she must come at once. She returned to France almost beside herself with grief, giving her whole soul to her husband in a parting kiss.

It was to be their last.

Misfortune followed misfortune with astounding rapidity. Monsieur de Mauluçon and Jacques de Pontivy soon landed at Saint-Paire, and joined the Vendean army. At the first encounter Jacques was killed by a Republican bullet, and Monsieur de Mauluçon mortally wounded. He was secretly conveyed to London with other wounded royalists, and in spite of the fraternal welcome and care he found under the roof of the faithful friend who had always received them with open arms, he died there of his wounds. Clarisse learnt her double bereavement at the time when her father was breathing his last.

Thus she became a widow and an orphan in that brief space of time.

Prostrated by this double blow, she was for some time at death's door. When she came to herself after a delirium which lasted nearly a week, she saw her children—for Marie Thérèse, now doubly orphaned, was more her child than ever—seated at her bedside awaiting in unspeakable anxiety her return to consciousness. She drew them to her, and covered them with kisses.

“Console yourselves,” she said, “I shall live, since you are here.”

At this moment a man advanced smilingly towards her, his eyes glistening with tears of joy.

“Leonard!” she said, “you here?”

It was an old servant of Monsieur de Pontivy, who had come in all haste from Montmorency, where he lived, to attend the funeral of his late master.

“Ah!” he cried, “Madame can rest assured Leonard will not leave her till she is herself again.”

“Then I shall remain ill as long as possible,” she replied laughing, and she held out her hands to him.

Her convalescence was short, and as soon as she was on her feet again she began to think of the future. But Leonard had already thought of this. “You cannot remain here,” he said. “Your name, your connections, your fortune — everything denounces you, and exposes you to the ill-treatment of so-called patriots. You must leave Pontivy.”

“Go? But where?” asked Clarisse, “Abroad? I have already thought of that, but how can I reach the frontier with my young people without passport, and without guide?”

“The surest way to find shelter and safety is to remain in France,” Leonard answered. “Listen to my plans. I have a cottage hidden among the trees in a little hollow of the forest of Montmorency. The place is lonely and little frequented. You can take it in a borrowed name as my tenant. An honest couple, well known to me, a gardener and

his wife, will assist in the house, and in the cultivation of the little plot of ground. To avert suspicion, you can place your son with me as apprentice. I am one of the most influential members of the Democratic Society of Montmorency. My patronage is therefore a guarantee of your Republican principles. Olivier will learn a trade, and remain under your care, for he can return home every night to dinner, and thus, dear lady, we will await better times."

Clarisse consented joyfully, and in eight days the little family were installed in the cottage of the forest, secure and safe, in a narrow valley thickly planted with trees, whose bushy branches formed a second roof over their humble dwelling. Fourteen months Clarisse lived there unnoticed, hearing only of the events happening at Paris from the harrowing accounts of the guillotine and *noyades* which her son brought from the workshop, peopling the sleep of the two women with fearful dreams.

When! oh, when! would they emerge from that obscurity? When would the trumpet-call of deliverance sound for France! Clarisse dared not think. She trembled every instant for her own and her children's safety; for Olivier above all, who already took a too lively interest in the conversations of the workshop, and in popular manifestations. Clarisse did not acknowledge it that morning when she met her son, but she had not slept all night, although she had been aware that he would not re-



turn. So when the household duties were over she had come long before the time fixed, to wait for him, as she often did, in that green glade which opened on to the path he was wont to take. When she saw him in the distance she used to beckon to him, anticipating the joy of reunion; all a mother's tenderness smiling in her eyes and on her lips.

Clarisse now hoped that, having been out all night, Olivier would not assist at the *fête*. But she was mistaken, for he took his coat from Marie Thérèse and prepared to go. "What! you are not going to spend the day with us?"

"Now!" replied Olivier coaxingly. "You don't really mean it. And what about the *fête*? You know well my absence would be noticed. All the youth of Montmorency will be there. But I promise you to return for supper. At all events, I have an hour before me. Let us have a crust and some wine."

Clarisse rose from her seat, and Marie Thérèse helped the lad on with his coat; then all three went in the direction of the little bridge, but Olivier retraced his steps directly. He had forgotten his stick. Stooping to pick it up, he heard some one near him softly asking the way, and looking up, he found himself in the presence of a stranger, who pointed to a signpost knocked down by the wind, and from which the writing was defaced.

"Which of these cross-roads leads to La Chèvre?" he asked.

“This one,” Olivier answered.

The stranger thanked him, but at the sound of his voice, Clarisse, who had been listening, turned, and as she came nearer she gave a cry of joy.

“Is it possible! You here, Vaughan!” and she came towards him with outstretched hands.

The man’s face lighted up with joy as he turned to greet her:

“Madame de Mauluçon!”

“Hush!” she said, then lowering her voice, she introduced the two young people, who, surprised at first, smiled and shook hands with this friend of their family, whose name they had so often heard at Pontivy and Paris. In a few words Clarisse explained to the newcomer their circumstances, pointing out the peasant’s cottage hidden among the trees, where they lived away from the outside world. As she spoke her voice trembled, and she could with difficulty restrain her tears, for the man before her had held her dying husband in his arms. It was he who had heard his last words, closed his eyes, and sent Clarisse the terrible news. She longed to question him, but was restrained by the presence of the children. So when Marie Thérèse, who with a woman’s instinct felt they had sad and serious things to say to each other, asked if they might leave them, Clarisse thanked her with an eloquent look.

“That is right, children,” she said, “go on; we will rejoin you presently.”

Alone with Vaughan, her eyes filled with tears; she overwhelmed him with questions, which he answered with exquisite delicacy, softening every painful detail. Clothing his words considerably in a mist of generalities, he guided the conversation with infinite tact, avoiding some points, putting others in his turn, and finally he spoke of the agreeable impression that Olivier and Marie Thérèse had produced on him.

“What a pretty couple they would make!” he said; “but I suppose you have already destined them for each other!”

Now she could smile. He continued —

“Oh! I saw that at once. I congratulate you. And when is the wedding-day?”

Alas, how could she know? Under this abominable Government, marriage in the church had been abolished, and were they even to satisfy themselves with a civil contract the mayor would demand their birth certificates. These were no longer in her possession, even had she wished to produce them. And where were they?

“I have them,” replied Vaughan.

She looked at him in astonishment.

He then explained to her how he had found them among a bundle of papers which her husband had been sorting, in order to burn the most compromising, when death overtook him. He — Vaughan, the confidant of his last moments — had completed this task. Among the letters, acts, and accounts,

relating chiefly to politics and the different movements of the Chouans and the emigrants, he had found several family documents, some insignificant, others of more importance. These he had laid aside for Clarisse's perusal.

"I will now make a confession," he continued, "which must be made sooner or later."

He stopped embarrassed, and then, as if suddenly resolved, added —

"The work of classification has put me in possession of a family secret. Among the papers which I have to return to you are the birth and baptismal certificates of Olivier."

Clarisse looked at him anxiously. He continued after a pause —

"In glancing over these I perceived that both were dated 1775, that is, two years before your marriage."

Again he paused as if fearing to have said too much.

"And what conclusion did you draw from this?" she asked, resolved to hear the worst.

"That by your marriage with Monsieur de Mauluçon Olivier was then made legitimate."

She recoiled, pale and terrified. Never had such a possibility crossed her mind: her husband, the soul of loyalty and honour, he to be suspected!

"You are mistaken," she said, and added, now quite calm and self-possessed —

"Olivier bears the name of Monsieur de Mauluçon, but he is not his son . . . he is mine."

Vaughan made a gesture as if to prevent her continuing. He knew too much now. Deeply affected and embarrassed, he murmured a confused apology, overcome with admiration before this woman, who so frankly confessed her shame rather than let suspicion rest for a moment on a husband whose memory she revered. She led her companion to the trunk on which she had been sitting with her son, and asking him to listen to her story, she told of her youthful folly, her isolated life, her fall, and the cowardly desertion of the young secretary, whose name, however, she concealed; then of the noble generosity of Monsieur de Mauluçon, who had effaced the past by adopting as his own her son.

“Olivier knows nothing, of course?” asked Vaughan.

“Absolutely nothing. He thinks he is Monsieur de Mauluçon’s son.”

Vaughan took both her hands in his.

“You have suffered much,” he said. “May the rest of your years be years of joy and happiness!”

“God grant it!” she answered. “But it is hardly to be hoped in such fearful times of trouble and uncertainty.”

He did not reply at once, but seemed preoccupied. Then he said suddenly, as if continuing his thoughts aloud —

“Why don’t you come with me to England?”

“Are you returning, then?”

“Yes, in a few days.”

She gave a little cry of joy, then added regretfully —

“It is useless to think of it. There is always that question of passport in the way.”

Vaughan reassured her.

“I can arrange all that for you,” he said.

She looked at him in astonishment, wondering how such a thing could be possible to him, a foreigner. Then suddenly struck by the recollection that she had selfishly kept him occupied with her affairs all the time, she hastened to ask him what had brought him to France. Perhaps she was detaining him? And she begged him to forgive her want of thought.

“You need not make any excuse,” he said, smiling; “it would not have interested you, for my presence here is due to politics. It must astonish you that I should come to France when our countries are at war; but, be assured, I am well protected.”

And Vaughan explained to her how he had been sent by an influential member of the House of Commons to confer with the man who was looked upon as the most powerful, the master, in fact, of the Republic — Robespierre.

At the mention of this name Clarisse drew back terrified.

Vaughan evinced no particular surprise, for that name produced the same effect on every woman. Was not Robespierre, indeed, the personification of that bloodthirsty Government in whose iron grip France was then writhing in agony?

He traced a striking portrait of the Incorruptible, from the intricacies of his subtle politics to the fierce and stubborn ambition capable of anything to attain its end. Clarisse listened, spell-bound and trembling.

Vaughan, judging the man from a political standpoint, estimated him at his true value. His character, mediocre at the best, was exaggerated in England. The Whig party had commissioned Vaughan to propose to Robespierre an arrangement which, if accepted, would most likely change the face of things. But would he accept? Vaughan doubted it, for the arrangement, though in one way flattering to the self-love and pride of the Incorruptible, would at the same time diminish his importance, and set a curb on his ambition, which, as Vaughan well knew, with all the pretensions of the man to simplicity and republican austerity, was all-absorbing and unbounded.

Seeing Clarisse so attentive, Vaughan continued to paint Robespierre at home in the patriarchal circle of the Duplay family in the Rue Saint Honoré, where he occupied a modest apartment between that of the old couple and their younger son, as whose tutor he was acting until the time came for his marriage with Cornelia, Duplay's youngest daughter, to whom, as it seemed, he was devotedly attached.

Clarisse, her eyes fixed on Vaughan, drank in every word. The Englishman went on, giving a precise and detailed account of Duplay's home — a home guarded by the wife, who watched the door in real bull-dog fashion, for it was the centre of

mistrust and suspicion. Yes, Robespierre was well guarded. He, Vaughan, even with an introduction as Pitt's agent, had not been able to see him. He had only succeeded after many difficulties in obtaining an interview in the forest, where he was to confer with him in secret, until joined by the Duplay family. Constantly beset by the fear of the Committee of Public Safety, who watched his every movement, he had arranged for a picnic in the glades, to avert suspicion from this forest interview.

Clarisse, pale and trembling, made a great effort to steady her voice, and asked —

“ Is he coming here ? ”

“ Why, yes ! ” replied Vaughan ; “ he will be here directly. I am a little early.”

Although accustomed to the effect which the name of Robespierre always produced, Vaughan would have been surprised to see Clarisse's emotion had he watched her face, but being preoccupied, he looked at her without taking notice, and continued —

“ Yes, the chance is opportune. It will enable me to ask for your passport. He cannot refuse.”

Clarisse looked at him, petrified with horror.

“ And is it to *him* that you will go for our passports ? ” she said.

“ Yes,” replied Vaughan ; “ and I am quite sure of obtaining them.”

“ Impossible ! ” exclaimed Clarisse. “ It cannot be ! ”



“Why, dear friend?” asked Vaughan, beginning to show signs of astonishment.

“He would want to know my name.”

“Well! and I should tell him.”

“Oh no; anything but that!” she gasped, bounding forward as if to seal his lips with her hands; then she commenced to walk madly to and fro, no longer able to control her emotion.

Vaughan, more and more mystified, looked at her in amazement. “I cannot understand you,” he said.

She gazed at him for a moment, silent and hesitating, then, as if suddenly resolved, she went up to him.

“A word will explain everything. Since you are already possessed of half the secret of my life, it is perhaps better that you should know all.”

She paused, and then continued —

“Olivier’s father ——”

“Well!” interposed Vaughan, now aghast in his turn, scarcely daring to understand her.

“*He* is Olivier’s father!”

And as if broken with the effort, she sank down by the fallen tree-trunk, and sobbed aloud.

“Oh, my poor, poor friend!” exclaimed Vaughan as he bent over her. “I who thought your sufferings were at an end, and in my ignorance added to them by telling you so brutally what I thought of that man!”

“You did not tell me more than I have thought

myself," she said. "For a long time, to my contempt for him has been added an absolute abhorrence."

Vaughan here interrupted her with a gesture, intimating silence, his eyes fixed on the distance.

"Is it he?" she said in a trembling whisper.

Vaughan continued to look. He could make out the dim outline of a man's form advancing through the trees.

Clarisse turned to escape, whispering as she went: "Will you come on afterwards to the house?"

"No; to-morrow I will, not to-day. He is sure to have me followed," replied Vaughan, his eyes still fixed on the advancing figure.

Clarisse was about to reply, but Vaughan had recognised Robespierre.

"It is he!" he exclaimed. "Go quickly, he is coming this way," pointing to the path by which Olivier had come.

Clarisse had already crossed the stream and was standing behind a curtain of reeds. She parted them gently and asked, with shaking voice —

"Where is he?"

Even in her fear she remained a woman, divided between a horror of the man and the desire to see him again.

"Ah! I see him . . . Adieu, till to-morrow. . . ."

The reeds fell back into their places, and

Vaughan, left alone, seated himself on the tree-trunk. Robespierre soon came up, walking leisurely, a bunch of blue periwinkles in his hand, his eyes on the grass, seeking others. He stooped here and there to gather and arrange them daintily as a bouquet. He was elegantly dressed, with top-boots, chamois knee-breeches, a tight-fitting redingote of grey stuff, and a waistcoat with revers. A red-haired dog of Danish breed gambolled before him, without fraternising unduly, as if his master's faultless attire somewhat overawed him. At a few steps from the stream Robespierre perceived Vaughan, and came to an abrupt halt. At the same time two men appeared, wearing carmagnole jackets and two-horned hats, and carrying stout cudgels. Vaughan rose to meet the Incorruptible. The dog began to bark.

“Advance no further!” cried Robespierre. “Who are you?”

He made a sign to the two men, who evidently had been acting as scouts, and sent them towards Vaughan, who, though aware of his ways, was still a little taken back at these strange preliminaries. Vaughan gave the two men his note of introduction.

Robespierre took the paper, and drew out of his pocket a gold case, from which he took a pair of blue, silver-rimmed spectacles, which he carefully wiped and put on.

“It's all right,” he said, after reading the note;

and addressing himself to the two men, he added, "Leave me now, but do not go far, and, above all, keep watch round about."

And Robespierre crossed the bridge, and advanced towards Vaughan, followed by his dog.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARREST

THE two men measured each other from head to foot with rapid glances ; the one with curiosity, the other with mistrust ; and, as if the letter of introduction had not sufficed, Robespierre requested the Englishman to give his name. Vaughan complied, thinking it unadvisable to bandy words with such a personage. He it was, he explained, who on his arrival from London had written to Robespierre the day before, asking the favour of an interview. He had been in Paris two days, and was staying at the American Consulate, under the name of Martin, but his real name was Vaughan — Benjamin Vaughan, one of the Whig members of the Opposition in the House of Commons. He then unfolded to Robespierre the object of his mission, telling him how he had been sent by the illustrious Fox, the fierce opponent of Pitt's anti-republican policy . . .

“ Yes, I know,” Robespierre interposed. “ I know Mr. Fox is the champion of democracy. He is a grand character, and richly gifted. I had his speeches translated, and read them with intense interest. I followed every word of his fine oratori-

cal contest with Burke, and was deeply moved at the solemn rupture of their friendship of twenty years' standing! Ah! There is something grand, heroic, thus to sunder the closest tie in defence of one's principles. It is worthy of another age. They are Romans, your leaders! And what are Mr. Fox's wishes, may I ask?"

The Englishman was about to explain the principal points, when Robespierre again interrupted him by a gesture. Did he not hear a noise among the leaves, though Blount, the watch-dog, who prowled round about like a vigilant sentinel, had not barked? Robespierre begged Vaughan to continue, but was still on the *qui-vive*, listening with divided attention, nervous and uneasy, as if fearing to be surprised in this conference with a stranger.

And the interview was, to say the least, compromising. Fox and his influential friends of the Whig party proposed a secret agreement which would perhaps induce England and the Powers allied against France to put down their arms, thus giving satisfaction to the Royalists, without in any way interfering with the legitimate claims of the Revolutionists. Robespierre looked at the Englishman in surprise, still unable to grasp his meaning.

Vaughan then explained more concisely that the Whig party dreamt of establishing a Constitutional monarchy in France, on the same principles as in England, with the little son of Louis XVI., now a prisoner in the Temple, as King . . .

“But think a moment!” interrupted Robespierre.

“With a Regency, of course, and an absolute guardianship,” continued Vaughan.

“The French nation would never hear of it.”

“But why not, since the Regency would be confided to you?”

Robespierre started back.

“What, to me! I, the Regent, the tutor of that boy? You are joking!”

The “Incorruptible” did not think fit to tell him that five years previously he had vainly solicited the position of tutor to the royal infant at Versailles. He now walked excitedly to and fro, asserting positively his refusal, in short, broken phrases; all the while on the alert for the slightest sound, and stopping now and then to ask, “Did you hear anything? I thought I heard steps? Are you there, Blount? Hoop la! Good dog! Keep a good watch!”

Carried away by his vanity, Robespierre laid his soul bare before the Englishman, who listened with the greatest curiosity and interest. “Restore Royalty? Ah! it was too ludicrous! Had he worked, then, to re-establish a kingdom for the son of the man he had sent to the scaffold? No! he had worked first for France, whom he had purged of her internal evils, of the whole corrupt and infamous crowd that had so long polluted her! And then for himself; oh no! not from motives of personal ambition, but because he felt himself called to regenerate his

country, to breathe into her a new soul, cleansed in the pure waters of virtue and justice and equality.

“Regent, indeed? Fox could not mean it! Dictator, perhaps; Protector, as was Cromwell; Lord-Protector of his country, now degraded by centuries of tyranny and corruption. Ah! they would soon see her arise, pure and radiant, cleansed of all stain, regenerated by a baptism of blood! A few more heads, and then from the soil soaked with the blood of aristocrats, those butchers of the old *régime*, would spring the tree of liberty, the tree of life and justice, of joy and love, which would bring forth marvellous fruits, and to whose branches France would cling for support and nourishment, as to a mother’s breast!”

Vaughan gazed at him in bewilderment. For through this ambition, this bloodthirsty hypocrisy, he descried the madman; and the Englishman said within himself that the man was absolutely dangerous. He only interrupted Robespierre as a matter of form, knowing well there was absolutely nothing in the way of common sense to be looked for in such a fanatic.

“So you refuse?” said Vaughan, in conclusion.

“Decidedly!”

“Then I have only to retire, with your permission.”

But Robespierre turned round abruptly. Blount had started barking, and a man was crossing their path.



“Who is that?” said Robespierre, in a frightened voice.

“The man looks like a beggar,” said Vaughan, his eyes bent on the approaching figure.

“Do you think so?” he answered, only half convinced. “A spy, perhaps? For I am surrounded with spies, monsieur! Ah, my life is awful! And if I were not working for the happiness of France . . .”

A sound of voices was on the air, and the bark of a dog died away in the distance. It was Robespierre’s two scouts driving off the beggar.

Released from suspense, Robespierre turned again to Vaughan.

“We must part company now,” he said, “but not a word of our interview! I can count on your discretion, I am sure. If not, beware, for I could charge you with attempted bribery and corruption.”

Vaughan assured him of his secrecy, telling him he was returning to London by Geneva, to allay suspicion. Seeing Robespierre’s agitation, he felt it was hardly the moment to ask for the passports he required for Clarisse and her two young people. He ventured, however, but saw immediately by the expression of distrust on the face of his interlocutor that he was not mistaken. Robespierre refused bluntly, saying that Vaughan should use every precaution to avert discovery. The slightest imprudence was sufficient to betray him. It would be too noticeable to travel in numbers in times when every

one was suspected and shadowed. And what would it be for four people? His friend had but to come to him a few days hence, and he would give her the passports, only too happy to be of service to a family in whom Monsieur Vaughan was interested.

The latter politely declined this offer, feigning indifference, and took leave of Robespierre, who kept him in sight until he disappeared round a bend in the road.

Left alone, Robespierre's suspicions were aroused. He began to ask himself who was the woman in whom the Englishman was so much interested. Vaughan had friends, then, in France, to whom no doubt he would describe their interview in the forest, or, at the very least, how he had spent the morning. Robespierre turned to call his men, who were close at hand.

"Quickly," he cried. "Set an agent on the track of the man who has just left, and keep me informed of his actions and movements until he leaves Paris.

"You are right, citizen, for the fellow looked d—d suspicious," said one of the men, Didier, who played the part of a *Tricotay l'Ermitte* to the Incorruptible.

"How is that?" interrupted Robespierre, starting.

Then Didier, who had just heard it from one of his agents on watch in the neighbourhood, told Robespierre of the interview between Clarisse and Vaughan at the place they were standing. He also

described the hurried departure of Clarisse when Robespierre arrived, and how she had then flown, in all haste, to her house, a few steps off, and shut herself in.

This was too much for Robespierre, whose misgivings had been already awakened.

“What! a third person, a stranger, was cognizant of my interview with the Englishman? Let that woman be arrested instantly,” he exclaimed.

“But there are two of them,” said Didier, “mother and daughter.”

“Then have them both arrested! Arrest the three of them, for there is also a son, I believe!”

“Yes, but he is not there at this moment,” said Didier.

“Then arrest him when he returns!”

Didier gave the order to his companion, and returned to Robespierre.

“And where must they be taken?” he asked. “To what prison?”

“Where you like! Only see that they are arrested immediately. Now be quiet . . . here come our friends!”

The tinkling of a bell was heard, and the crack of a whip. Then gay voices and bursts of laughter and merriment broke on the ear. A man made his appearance, who was lame and walked with the help of a stick, preceded by Blount, the dog gambolling round him in welcome. It was Duplay's nephew, Simon, the wooden-legged. While a vol-

unteer in 1792, he had lost his left leg at the battle of Valmy, and now, disabled and pensioned off by the army commission, he acted as secretary to Robespierre. Simon advanced gaily, like a guide reaching his journey's end.

“Good morning, Maximilien! Have you been here long?”

Robespierre was about to equivocate and say that he had only just arrived, but he was spared the trouble of replying. Cries of “Good morning, Maximilien! Good morning, friend!” sounded across the hedge, a few steps from him. The whole Duplay family appeared in sight, all perched on a cart drawn by a lean, jaded beast. Old Duplay, in his shirt sleeves, his face all red and bathed in perspiration, led the horse by the bridle over the ruts of the road, while his son, Maurice, a boy of fifteen, ran about, his hair floating in the wind, waving the branch of a tree to beat away the flies. Behind the cart, pushing it forward by the wheels, was another man, neatly dressed. This was Lebas, Robespierre's colleague at the Convention and at the Committee of Public Safety, the husband of one of Duplay's daughters. In the cart were all the family: mother Duplay, seated on a stool, a solidly built woman, with arms bare to the elbow, holding the reins, and by her side, seated on a heap of provisions and crockery, were the three daughters, Elizabeth, the wife of Lebas; Victoire, the youngest, a fair-haired girl with beautiful eyes; and Eleonore, or Cornélie,

for the Duplays had unearthed the name of a Roman matron to give her a character of antique grace in the sight of Robespierre, who, it was said, was going to marry her.

Dark and strong, with clear, almond-shaped eyes, her hair neatly plaited, Cornélie was dressed like her sisters, in light summer clothes, with a simplicity in which a practised eye could detect a grain of coquetry. The three sisters wore bonnets, caught up and fastened with tricolour ribbons and cockades, thus giving to the old cart, decorated with branches and palms gathered on the way, an air of gaiety and life.

It was a custom of the Duplays to come thus on fine days to join their friend, in some shady, secluded spot for a picnic on the grass, and enjoy his company for a few quiet hours of intimacy in the silence and coolness of the wood.

The cart now stopped.

Robespierre gallantly assisted the women to alight, amidst timid exclamations and flutters of fear and laughing protests of: "Oh! dear! How high! I shall never be able to get down!" followed by ripples of laughter and a whole babel of questions and chatter. "Have you slept well, *bon ami*? Ah! How well you look this morning!"

"The joy of seeing you," replied Robespierre.

They went into ecstasy over his slightest words. Oh, how good he was, how kind! And what a dream the place was, so joyous, so cool! Only he could have discovered such a spot!

Mother Duplay had already commenced unpacking the provisions — slices of sausage, shrimp paste, cold chicken, a melon, watercress, Brie cheese, and buns. She called her daughters to help her, whilst Duplay unharnessed the horse and Lebas conversed with Robespierre, giving him the latest news from Paris. Wooden-legged Simon looked around for a convenient spot to spread the cloth, and the boy Maurice occupied himself in coaxing Blount to stand on his hind legs and beg for sugar.

Suddenly all movement was suspended, and every ear strained to listen, for screams were heard coming from behind the clump of trees in the background.

“It sounds like women’s voices,” said Cornélie anxiously.

“You were right, they were women’s voices,” repeated Madame Lebas, who had advanced in the direction whence the sound came.

Robespierre hastened to reassure them.

“It is nothing!” he said calmly, and as every one looked at him questioning, he added indifferently, “They are only arresting two aristocrats!”

“Oh, is that all?” said the two women, reassured.

Duplay and Simon approached nearer the Incorruptible, scenting a story. Robespierre assumed an air of superior mystery. It was a good find. . . . He had tracked them down. . . .

At this moment Didier appeared.

"Is everything right?" asked Robespierre.

"Everything is right, citizen," replied Didier.

Apparently satisfied, the Incorruptible turned round, and went towards Cornélie, who had stooped to gather a daisy. A few steps off, on the other trunk, Robespierre had laid the bouquet of blue periwinkles gathered in his morning walk through the forest. He now offered it to her.

"Oh, the pretty things!" she exclaimed, thanking him for the delicate attention.

"It was the flower Rousseau loved," Robespierre observed.

"You are as kind and good as he," the young girl replied, knowing she gave pleasure to the Incorruptible in thus comparing him to his master.

Robespierre, pleased and flattered, fastened the flowers in the young girl's dress. A gentle breeze murmured through the leaves, fanning them as it passed. It had come from afar, laden with a scent of cultivated blossoms, the heavy perfume of roses that grew in Clarisse's garden.

"Ah, life is sweet sometimes," sighed Cornélie.

And Robespierre, inhaling deep draughts of the perfumed air, assented with a smile.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SON

OLIVIER did not wait until the end of the rejoicings at Saint-Prix. About five o'clock, profiting by a moment when the public were occupied with one of the usual commonplaces of popular festivals, and their attention was fixed on the simulated dispute of two mountebanks on the stage, he made his way through the gaping groups until he reached the country. Besides the pleasure of surprising his mother and Thérèse by his unexpected return, the thoughts of an early supper and a long sleep possessed him pleasantly as he quickened his steps.

His nerves had been more unstrung by all this bustle and movement of the revels than by the sleepless night he had passed on the eve of the *fête*. His brain reeled; he had been dazed in the midst of the surging tumult, the boisterous merry-making of a multitude let loose under the burning midsummer sun, as the clamour rolled in swelling waves of sound above the crowd, above the gleam and shimmer of tricolour scarves and cockades; up to the official stands, in murmurs of enthusiastic approval, which harmonised with the extravagant harangues of the orators almost as a musical accompaniment.



How they mouthed their periods, and declaimed their sentences, lavish of revolutionary rant, repeated and reiterated to such excess that Olivier's heart throbbed and a pulse beat at his temples, responsive to the din of those recurring words liberty, equality, fraternity, truth, justice, virtue, tyrant, pervert, corruptor, and suspect! And to think that to-morrow it would all begin again! For at the workshop they discussed politics, and he dared not be indifferent, or even appear lukewarm before these enthusiasts, or he would be immediately suspected! Ah, yes! Every one was suspected who did not howl with the wolves.

"My God! I am weary to death of it all," he exclaimed, in a sudden revulsion of feeling at the *rôle* he had assumed for fourteen months—he, the son of a noble, of a Vendean! His lips quivered, his breast heaved at the thought of the string of horrors discussed and upheld in his presence, which caused every fibre of his being to shrink, and against which his whole soul revolted in mute indignation.

The image of two women rose before his eyes: his mother with joined hands imploring him to moderate his zeal, to subdue the impetuous ardour of his youth a while longer.

"Have but a little patience," she would say; "it will not, cannot last. The reaction is nearer than you think."

He smiled at her over-confidence, feigned per-

haps to quiet him, as he hastened his steps, thinking of the expected kiss, picturing her joy and surprise, imagining himself already in her arms, looking into her eyes, so full of tender love, and saying to her, "Yes, mother, it is I, and I am going to stay till to-morrow morning!"

Olivier had taken a path across a rough and woody district, which shortened his walk by the third of a mile. He felt worn out, but at the sight of the trees in the distance which surrounded their little cottage, he took heart and quickened his steps.

The gardener was waiting for him at the door, and Olivier called out to him joyfully —

"Hallo, Paul! You did not expect to see me so soon, eh?"

But the man's expression told him instantly that something unusual had happened. His mother was ill perhaps — or Thérèse? He began to question the man anxiously, and when he reached him, stammered out —

"What is amiss? What is it? Oh, tell me quickly!"

In a few words the gardener told him all: how the home had been invaded; the arrest of the two women; the agent's rough, off-hand replies to Clarisse's entreaties and protestations; then their tears, their screams, and their hurried departure in the direction of Montmorency, hastened, no doubt, to avoid disturbing the little family gathering just near the Carrefour de la Chèvre.

Olivier, overpowered by the terrible details the gardener had been giving him, did not even think of asking to what family gathering he was alluding, but the name of the place, the Carrefour de la Chèvre struck him at once, and made him think of Vaughan.

“And the Englishman?” he asked.

“Which Englishman?” the gardener replied.

Olivier, seizing him nervously by the arm, hurriedly explained.

“You know that when I left this morning, Thérèse was alone. . . . My mother. . . . Did not she return afterwards with a stranger?”

“No,” answered the gardener, “the citoyenne Durand returned alone, and even. . . .”

“And even, what?”

“And even in great haste. She seemed excited, looking behind her, as if she did not wish to be seen by the pleasure-party.”

“What pleasure-party?” asked Olivier excitedly.

“A pleasure-party of citoyens and citoyennes, who were picnicking on the grass at the cross-roads of la Chèvre, and who seemed to know all about the arrest, for one of the agents went to speak to them afterwards.”

“And who were they?” asked Olivier, thinking he was on the track at last.

“Indeed, citizen, I do not know.”

“Are they still there?” inquired Olivier, with a ray of hope.

“ Oh! they have been gone a long time.”

“ In what direction ? ”

“ I cannot say.”

“ And you say that my mother and Thérèse have been taken to Montmorency ? ”

“ I am quite sure of it, unless, of course, the agents could find means of conveyance somewhere else.”

“ A conveyance ? What for ? ”

“ To take them to Paris.”

“ Are they going to Paris, then ? ”

“ I suppose so, as they are arrested.”

Arrested ! Olivier could not reconcile himself to the idea. Why arrested ? What had they done ? Of what crime were they guilty ? For the tenth time the gardener told him he knew no more than he did, and the lad, beside himself with rage, violently reproached the gardener for not having fetched him at once from Saint-Prix.

“ And who would have watched the house ? ” the gardener replied, who had thought it better to guard his bedridden wife than to compromise himself by starting off in search of Olivier.

The young man rushed into the house like a whirlwind, his haggard eyes roving round the empty rooms, with the mad, impossible hope that Thérèse was hidden behind some piece of furniture, and would burst upon him in a peal of laughter, as in the days of childish gambols. Then suddenly he darted off like a madman in the direction of Mont-

morency. He would go and tell the news to Leonard, who must have returned by this time. Perhaps he already knew? He stopped as suddenly: an idea had struck him. If the agents had ordered a conveyance at Montmorency, he had only to interrogate the driver. That was clear enough! So he resumed his headlong course, jumping the ditches as he went, reckless of all risks.

On the way he fell into Leonard's arms. The locksmith had learnt everything from the driver who had taken Clarisse and Thérèse to Paris, and had stopped at the workshop on his way back. The two women had been placed in the prison of La Bourbe, at Port-Royal, arrested as "suspects."

"But by whose orders?" asked Olivier, stupefied.

"Robespierre's."

"The wretch!" he vociferated as he fell on a chair, frantic with rage.

But he was soon on his feet again, resolute and decided.

"I must go!" he said; "I must start at once for Paris. I must have them from that prison! For now prison means the guillotine!"

Leonard held him back, begging him to wait till the morrow, entreating him to be prudent, and to do nothing rashly. But Olivier was deaf to counsel or entreaty, and at last succeeded in obtaining from the locksmith the address of a furnished apartment in the Rue du Rocher, in a quiet, respectable house.

Only giving himself time to go in the adjoining room and take a travelling-bag he had left in Leonard's care; packed with a few clothes and sundry other articles brought with him from Pontivy, Olivier started for Paris, accompanied at first by Leonard, who took leave of him at a junction of the roads.

"Pray for me, Leonard," he said, taking an affectionate farewell, "for I say it again, they shall come out of that prison, even if I have to pay for it with my life."

At midnight Olivier arrived at the Rue du Rocher, having walked the whole way without really knowing how, mind and body being given up to the one haunting thought. He rang at the house indicated to him, and secured a room, mentioning Leonard as a reference, and when the concierge asked his name he replied —

"Germain, Citoyen Germain. Could I go to my room now? I am so sleepy."

And yet he did not sleep. He did not even attempt to lie down, but paced the room impatiently, trying at times to sit down quietly, then rising to recommence his walk to and fro, waiting for the daylight with feverish impatience. He undid his bed, rumbled it to make it look as if it had been slept in, and going downstairs knocked gently at the concierge's room to have the front door opened. He then hastened through the deserted streets to the prison of La Bourbe, without once asking his way,

for the directions Leonard had given him were firmly engraved on his memory, and arrived there sooner than he had expected.

When the grey and red mass of Port-Royal Abbey rose before him, his heart beat wildly. It was in one of those buildings, now transformed into a prison, that his mother and his *fiancée* were immured! It was within those walls that they suffered, that they wept bitter tears in their utter despair, thinking surely of him, wondering what had been his fate!

And the reality appeared even more desperate now! In his haste to reach them Olivier had not considered how to gain admittance to the prison. In a moment all the difficulty of such an undertaking rushed on his mind, as he stood alone and helpless before those massive walls. Trying to solve the problem, he devised schemes only to discard them as impracticable. He no longer scanned the windows, for fear of attracting attention. He suspected a spy in every passer-by. Once he even tried to assume a smile, thinking his mental agony might be seen on his face. He put on an air of indifference, making a *détour* of the prison, carelessly examining everything to avert suspicion. At last, thoroughly worn out, he moved away, vaguely hoping to find a happy inspiration in some lonely spot, where he could be more master of himself.

To whom could he turn for assistance? He knew no one. All the friends of his family, formerly settled in Paris, were now either abroad or in

prison, if they had not perished on the scaffold or in the war. And then he thought of the Englishman Vaughan. Where was he to be found? In prison, perhaps, arrested with the others in the forest. Everything was possible. A sudden idea flashed across his mind, an idea which, however, he quickly rejected, judging it imprudent. He had wandered into the Rue des Lions, the neighbourhood of his grandfather's town house, and had thought of Benoît, the porter. Was he still there? He shrugged his shoulders despairingly, just remembering that the mansion was now the property of the State. The neighbours might also recognise him, and he would compromise himself uselessly.

Thus wandering, Olivier found himself back again in the Rue du Rocher, in front of his lodgings, though he could not tell by what way he had come. Going up to his room, he locked himself in to rest a while. His head swam, and he realised for the first time that he had eaten nothing since the previous day, so he called down to ask if he could have something to eat. As it was just breakfast-time they sent up some eggs, a cutlet, and some fruit. He ate the eggs, tasted the cutlet, but did not finish it. Then, as a reaction set in, he sunk into an armchair and slept.

When Olivier awoke it was four o'clock. He started up quickly, vexed at having lost his day, and hurried downstairs. On the ground floor the concierge stopped him.



"I want a word with you," he said. "You are really the citizen Germain, are you not?"

"Yes," answered Olivier, already apprehensive, and wondering what was coming.

"Well, I was going to say you have not shown me your passport. I did not ask you last night, as it was so late."

"But I have not any," said Olivier, taken back. Then, on second thoughts, he added —

"That is to say, I left it in the country."

"You can easily procure one at the police section. It is indispensable. We cannot keep you here without it. That is the law now."

"I know," said Olivier, forcing a smile, "Well, to-morrow I will put everything right, for to-day I have so much to do."

"To-morrow is *décadi*," the concierge remarked, "and it would be difficult for you."

"Then the day after to-morrow?"

"Very well," said the concierge, "but don't fail, for I am responsible, you know."

Olivier thanked him and hastened away. He had not reckoned on such a complication. If he could only see his mother and his *fiancée*, what mattered anything else? He retraced his steps towards the prison, this time taking the Rue de l'Arcade, and finding himself suddenly opposite the Madeleine, he turned into the Rue de la Révolution.

There he noticed an unusual stir, which increased as he neared the Place de la Révolution. The

streets appeared very gay, gayer than those he had just left. On looking up he saw that the houses were decorated with tricolour scarves and flags, and that men perched on ladders were hanging garlands and foliage over the shop windows. At the entrance of the Place masts were being erected by a continuous stream of journeymen and workmen, with whom were mixed an increasing crowd of onlookers. Olivier thought of the previous day's *fête*, and of the platforms he had helped to construct.

"So the Paris Democratic Society are having their *fête* also," he said to himself.

On questioning a passer-by he was told that preparations were being made for a festival in honour of the Supreme Being, which was to take place the next day on the Place de la Révolution. Olivier had forgotten this in the confusion of his mind, though he had heard it spoken of among his comrades at the workshop.

The Festival of the Supreme Being! The coming triumph of Robespierre, the open parade of his hypocrisy and pride, amidst the acclamations of a servile multitude dominated by a tyrannical and terrorising Dictator!

Olivier's whole soul revolted against the injustice of human destiny which placed supreme power in the hands of such a tyrant. The image of his mother and Thérèse, arrested by this man's orders, rose again before his eyes.

Suddenly he stopped.

On the Place de la Révolution, between the statue of Liberty and the entrance to the Tuileries, his astonished sight fell on an erection which, to all appearance, was being taken down — cross-bars of wood, lowered by the aid of ropes and pulleys, and an enormous knife slowly descending.

Olivier turned pale, his knees shaking under him.

It was the guillotine !

The hideous, barbarous word breathing death — a horrible, ghastly death — rang in his ears, and was re-echoed by mock voices of despairing victims, the guil . . . lo . . . tine — the guil . . . lo . . . tine — the guil . . . lo . . . tine.

Yes, this was the guillotine !

There it rose in front of him, the atrocious, abominable machine, which had caused the best blood of France to flow, the instrument of human butchery, which had severed so many heads ; there it rose amidst the festive preparations, as a fearful warning !

The knife continued its descent, slowly, silently, mirroring the sun in blue metallic reflections, which seemed to sparkle in its rays. Olivier followed every movement, with fascinated horror.

When the huge blade disappeared the young man shook himself together with an effort, and seeing a woman of the people passing, questioned her —

“ What was that ? ”

The woman was wary in her answer, the question appeared to her so ingenuous.

“It’s Madame Robespierre!”

“I know it is the guillotine,” replied Olivier, “but I wish to know what they are doing there.”

“They are taking it away.”

“Ah!” he exclaimed, much relieved.

“But it is to be put up elsewhere.”

“Where?” he asked, again cast down.

“At the Place de la Bastille.” And she added with a smile: “It seems there are still some aristocrats to settle.”

Olivier gave her an anxious, searching glance, but reading mere ignorance in her eyes, he was reassured, and began to wonder at the indifference of this people, this simple, open-hearted race, which had allowed themselves to be duped so many long months. He looked around him at the vast square which, as the horrible scaffold was removed, wore quite a festive air, smiling under its gay decorations of flags and coloured devices and girandoles, which were characteristic of the jovial humour and the drollery of the French populace, always so light-hearted.

All this increased his own misery.

What? Alone in the crowd, he must suffer, alone he must lament! He rebelled against it. Was there no one to defy that infamous instrument of torture which had been erected there as an insult to human reason, and which was taken down to be set up elsewhere? It was indeed the end of France! Not one upright soul, not one

just man brave enough to cry with outraged conscience: "Down with the scaffold!" Not a single Frenchman to be found to stay his fellow-countrymen, ignorant of true justice, dupes of cruel men in power, and to tear from their hands that ignoble invention, that monument of death, and make a bonfire of it all! Perhaps many thought as he did, but they dared not! . . . No, they dared not act! And yet a spark was sufficient to inflame the multitude, frivolous and easily led perhaps, but withal so noble, so humane, so generous!

Olivier crossed the Place de la Révolution, discouraged and down-hearted. He followed the parapet of the bridge without looking where he was going, making his way unconsciously in the direction of the Port-Royal quarter, where the prison lay.

An unexpected sight awaited him before the building. People were briskly entering by the principal door, moving gaily along with cardboard boxes, baskets, and bags. They were certainly neither tradespeople nor officials, for some of them were smartly dressed. They were visitors, perhaps? The thought filled him with joy. Alas! if he were mistaken!

On questioning a guard, his hopes were confirmed. They were visitors, relations or friends of the prisoners, admitted to see them and bring them sweets, fruits, and change of clothes.

"You have some one there?" asked the man.

“ My mother and my *fiancée*.”

“ You wish to see them ? ”

“ Yes, I do.”

“ Have you any money ? ”

Olivier had already offered him a piece of gold.

“ Oh ! not for me, for the concierge,” the man protested as he beckoned to Olivier to follow him. Passing through the gateway, he presented him to the concierge, a little man, thick set, brisk, and sly, who, seeing them in the distance, had understood Olivier’s object, and now asked him the name of the prisoners he wished to see.

“ The citoyennes Durand ? Very good ! Follow me. They must be in the Acacia Court ; ” and turning round, he added —

“ Here is a card which you will return to me when you come out.”

He then crossed a dark, narrow corridor, and stopped before an iron grating, which he opened for Olivier to pass in. As he showed him the courtyard he said laughing —

“ You will recognise them, won’t you ? ”

And he went away, shutting the grating.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PRISON OF LA BOURBE

OLIVIER found himself on the threshold of a vast courtyard enclosed by high walls, and by two enormous stone and brick buildings with cross-barred windows. The roof of these buildings was bordered by a spiked fence, in order, as it seemed, to make escape impossible. These were the very structures he had seen from the street. They were connected by a stone corridor with a terrace at the end, running parallel with it, where a sentinel patrolled with shouldered arms. The entrance to this corridor was secured by an enormous grating, which when opened put the courtyard in which Olivier now stood in communication with another open space planted with trees.

The young man advanced with some hesitation, for he saw some of the prisoners walking in the shade of an acacia, whose blossoms were bathed in the rosy light of the setting sun. A mound of grass surrounding the tree lent rustic freshness to the scene.

Olivier scanned these moving groups with beating heart, anxiously examining every one that passed him. There were men, women, and even children.

But he had recognised no one. His mother and Thérèse apparently were not there.

He would have questioned some one but dared not, vaguely fearing to compromise his dear ones, forgetting that the people before him were also prisoners, and their companions in suffering and misfortune. Just then a young woman, pretty and graceful in her simple toilet, wearing a white cambric cap finely goffered, came briskly towards him.

“You are perhaps looking for some one?” she said in a sweet voice.

“My mother and my *fiancée*, the *citoyennes* Durand.”

“Oh! they are still at table! Look, the young girl will not eat, and the elder lady is trying to persuade her.”

In his hesitation to advance further Olivier had not perceived, on the other side of the acacia, a table laid with coarse earthenware, which was being cleared by several turnkeys and waiters, and at which a few prisoners still lingered.

Yes, it was they, his beloved ones, at last! Olivier remained dumb, divided between his longing to hold them in his arms and the fear of taking them too brusquely by surprise. His unknown ally seemed to divine his feelings, for she said —

“If you like, I will go first to them.” Then, as if to reassure him, she introduced herself: “I am the Countess de Narbonne.”



Olivier, deeply moved, thanked her in broken phrases, and followed his friendly guide at a distance. Soon she was whispering in Clarisse's ear, as if preparing her for the unexpected visit. Clarisse turned round, and seeing her son, grew deadly pale. She rose and fell into his arms.

“Arrested? You also, my son?”

He pressed her to him, reassuring her.

“Oh, no! . . . I am free! . . . Be at peace, mother . . . I have had permission to see you.”

He then kissed Thérèse, who, still trembling, asked —

“Is it really true, you are free?”

Olivier again reassured them. Clarisse wished to find a secluded spot where they could talk undisturbed, and Thérèse having espied an empty bench under another acacia, they took possession of it.

Olivier now anxiously questioned his mother, wanting to know every detail of her arrest, but Clarisse interrupted him. He must first tell them about himself. Was he really safe? How did he get to Paris? Where was he staying? Olivier was obliged to answer, telling them his adventures as quickly as possible, that he might return to their arrest. When he had satisfied them, he asked breathlessly —

“And you? Tell me everything. I must know all.”

Clarisse then told him of their arrest, departure, and halt at Montmorency; of the long drive to

Paris, their arrival in the prison more dead than alive, and how they gained heart on learning it was one of the least cruel in Paris. She had been able to judge for herself when she awoke in the morning, and was so cordially received by her fellow-prisoners, men and women who, as she discovered on their introducing themselves, belonged to her world.

She then pointed out to Olivier among those taking their after-dinner promenade Madame de Narbonne, so gentle, so compassionate, and her little girl, such a darling child! then the Count and Countess de Lavergne; the Marquise de Choiseul, who had taken such kind and delicate interest in Thérèse at breakfast; the whole family de Malussie; the Count de Broglie; the Chevalier de Bar; the Maréchal de Mouchy and his lady, whom Clarisse had met in her youth at Versailles; Mademoiselle de Béthisy, and the Marquis d'Avaux.

"Yes," she said, with a sad smile. "I have not found myself in such elegant company since we left Pontivy."

"That is easily explained," replied Olivier; "the prisons of the Republic are used only for the nobility."

"You are mistaken," Clarisse answered gently. "Among the prisoners there are, I can assure you, men and women of the lower middle-class, who have given proofs of the highest nobility of soul."

"That is exactly what I mean — they are eminent in virtue, as the others are in birth. And they

are consequently not wanted. All that is wanted is equality. . . . Equality in infamy !”

“Hush! Be quiet, you may be heard!”

“Be quiet? I shall be quiet when they tell me of what you are accused; for, after all, why have you been arrested? What have you done?”

“That is just what we ask ourselves,” answered Clarisse. And then she continued as if she were thinking aloud —

“At first I fancied that some one had denounced us, but I put that thought aside at once, for who could have done so?”

“Who?” exclaimed Olivier, astonished that his mother as yet knew nothing. Looking at her fixedly, he continued —

“What! Is it possible they have not told you?”

“Told me? Who could tell me? . . . Then it was . . .?” she asked breathlessly.

“It was Robespierre!”

She bounded from her seat as if under an electric shock. Incredulous and stupefied, she protested in spite of herself.

“It is not true!” she exclaimed.

“How can it not be true? Leonard heard it from the driver who took you to Paris. Robespierre was a few yards off our house at the Carrefour de la Chèvre. It was from that very spot he set his agents upon you.”

These details brought back the scene to Clarisse’s

memory. And she thought of Vaughan, undoubtedly arrested also.

Olivier recalled her to the present, continuing to speak.

“Yes, it was Robespierre, the infamous wretch!”

She threw herself on him.

“Oh no! Hush! I implore you!”

He struggled to continue, but she prevented him, trying to drown his words.

“I am sure you are mistaken. . . . Leonard is mistaken. . . . It is certain. . . . I should have known. . . . If it were he . . . I should have known!”

“No! You could not have known. You yourself said so just now. Why should they account to you for their actions? It is he . . . he and no other!”

And Olivier then gave her minutely every detail as the gardener had told it to him. How one of the agents had conferred with Robespierre after the arrest, at the Carrefour de la Chèvre, where he was enjoying a picnic.

Ah! Clarisse needed no such explanations. It was he, she knew it too well. But how was she to persuade Olivier to the contrary? How prevent the son from cursing his father?

She tried to excuse Robespierre, attributing to him other motives.

“You see,” she said, “he does n’t know who we are. . . . He is mistaken. . . . His agents have

misled him. . . . There could be so many misunderstandings. . . .”

Olivier shrugged his shoulders.

“How credulous you are! Bah! he knows very well what he is doing! It is his thirst for blood. Oh! you don’t half know what he is, that Rob. . . .”

Clarisse, horror-stricken, put her fingers to his lips, to arrest the words.

“No! No! Don’t pronounce that name in such a way!”

And seeing him look at her in bewilderment, she tried to give him plausible reasons.

“You might be heard, and you would be compromised.”

“But how? Here? Where everybody holds his name in execration?”

“Yes; but then there are turnkeys coming and going at every moment. And what if there are spies among the prisoners . . . ?”

And, as if clutching at a straw, she followed up the idea.

“Yes, spies — traitors? You must not betray your feelings before them.”

“True! there is no lack of infamy among the populace!”

He then told his mother of the incidents of his wanderings in Paris, of his utter astonishment at the apathy of the crowd round that accursed scaffold which was being transported to the Place de la

Bastille, amidst the preparations for the Festival of the Supreme Being.

And yet he knew that much of their indifference must be assumed. How many thought as he did! How many had the long-awaited cry of deliverance on their lips: "Down with the scaffold!" Only they dared not speak out! If but one had the courage to give utterance to that cry, there would be enough brave men found in the crowd to take it up and re-echo it, carrying the more timid along with them. When once a move is made the multitude will quickly follow.

Clarisse looked at him. A new thought had dawned on her mind, a horrible thought!

What if Robespierre should have Olivier arrested without knowing who he was?

She interrupted him.

"Is the house where you lodge quite safe?"

As Olivier replied in the affirmative, and was continuing the narrative of his adventures, she took up the thread of his thoughts. Suddenly a gleam of hope shone in her eyes, as if her mental speculations had assured her.

"Ah! I did well to write to him!" she thought.

To him, to Robespierre! For she had written to the Incorruptible that very morning.

She now turned this letter over in her mind, in which she had informed him of her imprisonment, telling him her fears about her son, whose age she particularly mentioned as nineteen years. It was a

hint for Robespierre, who would understand, and perhaps be touched to pity, and set her and Marie Thérèse at liberty, and spare the lad who was her son and his own.

Clarisse had confided this letter to a prisoner set at liberty, whom she earnestly entreated to see it safely delivered.

“It will be the easiest thing in the world,” the man had replied; “you can be quite at rest.”

Clarisse did not suspect the irony of this reply, or that the supposed prisoner was one of the spies to whom she had unwittingly alluded a little while before. Ah, yes; she could be at rest, truly! The letter would reach Robespierre. But under what conditions? He, who received so many! Alas! It is in the wounded heart that most illusions take root! Clarisse did not dream that anything could interfere with her scheme, and began to speculate on the future, counting the hours, and saying to herself that in all probability the letter could reach Robespierre the next day.

The best she could do till then, she thought, was to moderate Olivier's zeal, by showing him that their prison-life was not so unbearable; and she imagined it would distract him if she presented him to some of her companions in misfortune. They had just taken away the tables, so making the courtyard appear larger, and leaving more room for the promenade. Olivier was now noticing more clearly the people in this little prison-world taking air and

exercise in the open space to which the green acacia-trees gave some semblance of a garden.

The women, dressed simply in summer toilets, retained an air of elegance in spite of the plain ribbon band fastening their hair, and their fresh, newly ironed caps. The men were gay and smiling, polite and distinguished; they talked and played cards or chess together on the benches, exchanging courtesies as if they were in a drawing-room. "After you! . . . I should not think of it! . . ." And in and out the groups the concierge Haly came and went, giving his orders, accompanied by two bulldogs, with enormous spiked collars.

Just then a fair-haired, bright-eyed boy of fifteen knocked up against Olivier.

"Oh! pardon, monsieur!" said the lad, who was playing a game of fives and running after the ball.

"What a nice lad!" said Olivier.

"It's young de Maillé," said Thérèse. "Nobody knows why he has been arrested. His doom is settled, however, for they say he threw a rotten herring at the head of the concierge."

Here Clarisse stopped her.

"So they say, but it is not true, for the concierge is a fairly honest fellow."

And addressing a lady who was just passing, she continued, "Is it not so, madame? Haly is not a bad fellow, is he?"

"No, but a blockhead; a lamb, however, compared to the jailers of other prisons."



Clarisse thus presented Olivier: "My son — Madame la Marquise de Choiseul."

Olivier bowed courteously, and as Madame de Choiseul, struck by the distinguished air of the young workman, held out her hand, Olivier took it in his and kissed it. In this high-born company all the grace of his early education came back to him.

The marquise smiled and turned to Clarisse.

"Behold a son who betrays his mother! Your name is not Durand. You belong to us. I had thought as much."

And as Clarisse was about to reply, she added: "Hush! I am not asking your secrets."

She then assured the young man that his mother was right: the concierge Haly, though rough, was rather kind than otherwise, letting visitors enter, and even bring in provisions, sweets, and linen.

"And above all," she added, "he does us the great favour of letting us walk about and disport ourselves here until night time."

She then pointed out to Olivier the various games in which the men and children took part.

"As you see," she added, "they take full advantage of the permission."

Clarisse, well pleased with the tone of the conversation, tried to retain the marquise.

"Tell him, madame, how you pass your evenings."

"What! Have you not yet told him?" asked

the marquise, who had been a silent spectator of the meeting between the mother and her son.

“You must not forget that I only arrived yesterday,” said Clarisse. “I know nothing myself but what I have heard.”

“Ah, true!” said Madame de Choiseul, who with a mother’s heart now understood Clarisse’s kindly motive.

At once she pointed out to Olivier the windows of one of the buildings.

“That is what we call our drawing-room — a large apartment in which we gather in the evening. There we play at guessing riddles, charades, and *bouts-rimés*. Some read verses, or recite to us, and we even have music. Look! Do you see that gentleman seated over there under an arch, turning the pages of an album? That is the Baron de Wyrbach, who plays some charming airs every evening on his *viola d’amoré*. He exhausts his ingenuity to find something new for us.”

Olivier listened in astonishment, beginning to be really reassured.

“You see,” continued the marquise, “we might imagine ourselves still at Versailles.”

Then she added with a sad smile —

“And so we are in one sense, for all that remains of Versailles is now in prison.”

And she mentioned many names, singling out among the prisoners those who belonged to the old Court: the Prince and Princess de Saint-Maurice,

the Chevalier de Pons, and the Count d'Armaillé, whose nephew, young d'Hauteville, had been a page to Louis XVI.

A group had formed round a young woman seated on the grassy knoll, her back against the acacia, fanning herself daintily.

"Look now! Would you not think it a court of love in one of the groves of Trianon? It is Madame de Méré receiving the homage of her admirers."

Madame de Méré rose at that moment to meet another lady who was coming towards her, pretty, neat, and natty in her spotless toilet; and Madame de Choiseul explained to Olivier who the newcomer was.

"That is Madame de Verneuil, who remains, though in prison, as coquettish and as fashionably dressed as she used to be at Court. She even finds time to make her usual change of toilet regularly three times a day, without the assistance of maid or hairdresser. Not only does she dress herself, and do her own hair, but she washes, dries, and gets up her own linen! And all this in such good-humour that it brings tears to one's eyes."

Olivier was now quite reassured with regard to the severity of the prison rules to which his mother and Thérèse were subjected. He was, nevertheless, astonished at the careless indifference which he saw around him. If the populace had revolted him on the Place de la Révolution, this aristocratic company

in the prison dumfounded him. He could not hide his feelings, or refrain from expressing his surprise; but he did so respectfully, with tact, and in perfectly good taste.

Clarisse essayed to interrupt him; but Madame de Choiseul had already replied —

“ You have just come from the country, perhaps, and have not mixed in the Parisian world for some time. What you take for indifference is in reality mere habit. You cannot change the French people. The moment they find a struggle useless, they gaily make the best of it. Believe me, their seeming frivolity only masks the resignation of a Stoic. There are still rebellious and desperate spirits to be found, but they are in a minority. The majority are heart-sick and ready to go, that is, to die; and they do die with a smile on their lips, French to the last!”

Voices and sounds of applause interrupted the marquise, and cries of “ Bravo! Bravo! That was very good!” were heard. A young girl, her arms tied behind her back, was bowing from the top of a ladder on which she was standing, and to which she had mounted by the aid of chairs and stools placed upon tables and benches. As she tried to descend all arms proffered assistance, and when she had reached the ground another lady came forward, the Marquise d’Avaux, whom Madame de Choiseul named to Olivier, and began to climb the improvised ascent with faltering steps.

Clarisse, Thérèse, and Olivier watched this per-

formance, understanding nothing of it. Madame de Choiseul looked at them to note their expression, and with one accord the three turned to question her —

“That is a new game, is it not?”

“Yes, and a rather gloomy one,” answered Madame de Choiseul. Then she added solemnly, “Those ladies are learning how to walk to the scaffold.”

She explained to them that the wooden steps which the condemned had to climb to reach the guillotine were difficult to ascend. The women encountered serious obstacles in mounting, being without the assistance of their hands, which were tied behind them. They stumbled and slipped, their dresses sometimes catching in the woodwork, to the great amusement of the rabble crowd.

“It is to avoid these accidents,” she said, “and to be able to meet their martyrdom respected by the mob, that they rehearse the *rôle* which they may be called upon to play on the morrow, perhaps, in public.”

Olivier was dumb with admiration before this contempt of the scaffold, the general resignation to the thought of death.

Presently peals of laughter were heard. The Marquise d’Avaux, just before reaching the last stool, caught her dress on the back of a chair. She laughed with the rest, and said gaily, showing her torn skirt —

“Some more work for this evening!”

“You see,” continued Madame de Choiseul, “what the indifference which revolted you so much just now hides in reality. Many of those young women keep up the failing courage of the men at the scaffold, and offer to die first.”

But Clarisse, whose curiosity was now satisfied, tried to turn attention from these gloomy subjects, her mother’s heart telling her they would reawaken Olivier’s apprehensions. She soon found a pretext. Madame de Narbonne passed them with her little girl, holding a basket of fruit, of which the child partook without restraint.

“What lovely cherries !” exclaimed Clarisse.

Madame de Narbonne stopped to offer her some, but Clarisse declined, and when pressed, said —

“Not for me, thanks ; but my niece will perhaps taste them.”

When Thérèse also asked to be excused, Olivier intervened.

“Only taste,” he said, and as she still declined, “Will you allow me, mademoiselle ?” he asked, taking a bunch from the basket which the child now carried. And he held one of the cherries up to his *fiancée’s* lips. “Won’t you take one to please me ?”

Clarisse could not help smiling. Olivier saw the smile. “And you, also, mamma !” he said.

Clarisse allowed herself to be persuaded, looking gratefully at the kind prisoner to whose good nature that little family scene was due, and Olivier was

beginning to renew his playful persuasions to Thérèse, when a bell sounded from behind the big grating, tolling slowly.

Madame de Narbonne turned pale.

“The call!” she gasped.

All conversation now ceased; men and women fell into groups, or left each other abruptly, looking anxiously towards the iron gate, as if expecting some one to appear. Olivier felt the universal shudder of dread, and his fears were again awakened.

“The call! What call!” he asked.

But the Marquise de Choiseul had gone away with Madame de Narbonne, carrying the little child along with them, in great haste. Olivier, turning round, met only the supplicating look of his mother, who had perhaps understood.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, with an effort.

Thérèse clung tremblingly to Clarisse, feeling that something terrible was to happen, and Olivier going towards one of the prisoners to question him was soon joined by Clarisse and Thérèse.

“The call? Why, it is the summons to such of the prisoners as are destined to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The bell had been rung to assemble all the prisoners to meet the Recorder, who, with list in hand, will read the names of those selected by the Revolutionary Tribunal for trial.”

“You mean for condemnation!” interrupted Olivier, with indignation.

The prisoner nodded assent.

“So all those who are named . . .”

“Will be taken in a cart to the Conciergerie, and . . .”

“And?”

“Ascend the scaffold two days after,” said the prisoner in conclusion, apparently resigned to his fate.

“Then it may be one of us, mamma?” asked Thérèse, bursting into tears.

Clarisse tried to master her emotion.

“No . . .” she said. “It’s too soon . . . is n’t it? . . . tell her . . .”

And she implored Olivier with a look.

“How can one know?” he said, driven to distraction.

“Oh no! . . . I assure you! . . . You will see. . . . It is impossible! . . .”

And still she murmured brokenly: “You will see. . . . It is impossible! . . .”

The Recorder of the Revolutionary Tribunal now passed the grating, accompanied by Haly, the concierge, and followed by turnkeys and gendarmes, who, on entering the courtyard, formed themselves in line. The Recorder was a little man, fat and full-blooded, his face twisted into a sly, ugly smile. He seemed highly amused at the spectacle, and seated himself under the acacia, talking to the concierge, who seemed surprised to see him, and said—



“I thought the Tribunal would not sit to-morrow on account of the Festival of the Supreme Being?”

“You are right! But they will sit the day after to-morrow. You understand, I want to be free to-morrow and to take part in the festival. . . .”

And with a cynical laugh he called for a glass of wine, which he emptied at a draught.

“Attention! We must begin business!” he said; and with this he unfolded the paper, the terrible paper, wherein the fate of the victims had been decided in advance. But the day was near its close, the Recorder could not see, and had to ask for a lantern.

The courtyard was full now.

Prisoners from the neighbouring yards had assembled in answer to the call. All this little world was affected by various feelings; some were resigned, some hopeful, some indifferent or frightened as they looked at the messenger of death, who seemed quite unconscious of his ignominy.

What names would fall from his lips? There were some, worn out and weary, looking forward to death as a release, who would have willingly put theirs into his mouth. Others, more feeble, who were undergoing the full horrors of suspense, stood in breathless fear, almost choked with anguish. Oh! that horrible hope of hearing another's name called, rather than one's own! And yet . . .

The Recorder was becoming impatient.

“Where is that lantern!” he shouted. “Is every one asleep here?”

A few of the prisoners had refrained from joining the anxious crowd; either from habit or indifference, without disturbing themselves, they continued playing or conversing as before. Clarisse and Thérèse were seated at a little distance, their eyes fixed on the dread official, while Olivier, standing near, ready to defend them, watched the affecting scene with strained anxiety.

The Recorder was swearing now.

“Is that cursed lantern never coming? So much the worse! I shall commence without it.”

And he rose and tried to decipher the names in the dark.

“The first name is Bour . . . no, Lour . . .”

Here a voice interrupted him in indignant protest.

“Oh! don’t read like that! You double their sufferings. It is horrible! too horrible!”

It was Olivier.

“Who dares to speak here?” thundered the Recorder.

Clarisse desperately pulled her son by the arm.

“I implore you! . . . my child! . . . I do implore you!”

At that moment some one appeared with a light.

“Ah! there’s the lantern!” cried the concierge.

When the man had explained that he had not been able to find any matches, the Recorder began to read the paper—

“Sourdeval!” he cried out.

Other lanterns were now lighting up the courtyard and the distracted crowd, and every eye was turned in the direction of the prisoner who had been named.

“Here I am!” cried a voice.

And a man advanced, his head erect, calm and impassive, without casting a single glance on the spectators, knowing no one perhaps. He crossed the line of gendarmes, and disappeared behind the grating to fetch his belongings.

The Recorder proceeded with his grim and gloomy task, drawing tears from some, heart-rending cries from others, and interrupted by murmurs of pity or defiance.

The young de Maillé, who was called among the first, stopped playing with the children to go to his death. An old man, Monsieur de Mauclère, at the sound of his name fainted away, and was carried out. Madame de Narbonne, called also, confided her little daughter to Madame de Choiseul.

“Where are you going, mamma?” asked the child.

And Madame de Narbonne had the courage to reply —

“I shall be back in a moment, my darling.”

“Don’t go, mamma! . . . don’t go! . . . I don’t want you to go!”

Madame de Narbonne hurried away to hide her tears, then, breaking down entirely, leant on the grating and sobbed aloud.

The Maleyssie family, father, mother, and two young girls, threw themselves into each other's arms, thanking heaven they were not to be separated in this supreme hour, and would walk hand in hand to the scaffold. An old couple with white hair, the Maréchal and Maréchale de Mouchy, worn with age, each walking with the aid of a stick, were called together. At once she took his arm, and so they made their way with calm courage through the prisoners, who bared their heads in reverence before such sublime resignation. Another couple drew forth cries of admiration : the Comte and Comtesse de Lavergne. The Comte, alone named, was taking leave of his wife, who, after assuring herself she was not on the list, implored the Recorder to include her. On his replying that he had no orders to do so, she uttered the cry of sedition punishable by death : "Vive le Roi !" and was inscribed forthwith on the fatal list.

Olivier now held his mother pressed against him, while Marie Thérèse and Clarisse, nestling together, followed the terrible spectacle with joined hands. All hearts were moved to admiration or to pity, according to the acts of courage or faint-heartedness which were displayed. But brave deeds predominated. A Monsieur de Gournay, called out whilst engaged in filling his pipe on a bench, rose quietly and lit it at a turnkey's lantern, and went towards the gate without a word. The Comte de Broglie, interrupted in a game of chess with the

Chevalier de Bar, as he rose pointed to the chess-board, and said —

“You see, you would have lost, chevalier. But cheer up! I shall let you have your revenge in the other world.”

Then, calm and composed, taking leave of the chevalier, bowing to his acquaintances, kissing the hands of the Marquise d’Avaux and of Madame de Méré, he followed the gendarmes to his fate.

A discussion was taking place near to where Olivier was standing over a name which had just been called.

“Leguay!”

Two men were speaking to each other; one was of middle age, turning grey; the other quite young.

“Are you also Leguay?” asked the young man, who when his name was called was surprised to see his fellow-prisoner advancing with him.

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Are you married, or a bachelor?”

“Married, and father of two children.”

“I am a soldier, and have neither wife nor child.  
. . . Go no further.”

The Recorder, who was growing impatient at the conversation of the two men, whom he took for relations taking leave of each other, shouted —

“Well! Leguay?”

“It is I,” answered the young man.

Only Olivier, Clarisse, and Thérèse had witnessed this sublime self-devotion. Olivier made a move-

ment as if to offer his hand to the young hero, but he had already crossed over to the gendarmes.

The Recorder now scribbled something on the list, and the people expected him to commence a new series. But he folded the paper, and after asking for another glass of wine, said —

“That is all for to-day.”

At these words an immediate feeling of relief ran through the crowd, awakening them from that terrible nightmare.

“Thank God!” said Clarisse, with a sigh.

“And you told me you were quite safe!” exclaimed Olivier.

Again she had the courage to conceal the truth.

“Oh! my anxiety was for others, not for ourselves.”

Olivier shook his head incredulously, and was about to reply, when the voice of Haly announcing the hour for the visitors to leave interrupted him.

“All visitors out! It is time to close!”

The Recorder by this time disappeared, preceded by gendarmes. The prancing of horses was heard in the neighbouring courtyard, amidst a confusion of orders and counter-orders. It was the men on duty who were putting the prisoners in the cart, now ready to start. Haly, posted at the grating of the gate by which Olivier had entered, received the cards of the visitors, examining them by the light of his lantern, which he suspiciously lifted to a level with their faces.

Olivier did not hurry his departure, in spite of the insistence of his mother, who was terrified at the thought that the gate might shut on him. But the concierge saw him.

“Hallo! You there! If you want to stay, you know, you have only to say so.”

“He is coming!” cried the two women.

And kissing him quickly, they pushed him towards the gate.

Olivier, before leaving, had promised his mother not to try and see them for some days, but to rest satisfied with writing, without giving his address.

The two women glanced in spite of themselves at the neighbouring courtyard, whence came a noise of wheels and the tramp of horses. They stooped, and saw through the large grating the cart with its load of the condemned roll away by the light of torches held by the turnkeys, and driven by a coachman in a carmagnole and red bonnet. As the vehicle was disappearing the two women recognised Madame de Narbonne in tears, sending kisses to the prison, in which her little girl had now wept herself to sleep.

“Oh! it is horrible!” said Thérèse.

And she fell on Clarisse’s shoulder, thoroughly broken by the terrible emotions of the day.

At this moment the cart reached the street, and passed close to Olivier, who commenced mechanically to follow it, while the people of the quarter, seated at their doors, and accustomed to this daily

spectacle, looked on with indifference. But at a bend in the road Olivier let the cart go out of sight, lost in reflection. He walked straight on as a man in a dream, stopping on the quay to look down at the Seine. The cooling freshness of the water seemed to revive him. He breathed the air gratefully, and continued his walk along the river, feeling less depressed.

Suddenly from the heights of Port-Royal his eyes were dazzled by a rush of unusual light. Showers of golden fire trailed in the air over the Tuileries gardens. It was a trial of the fireworks to be let off the next day. Olivier crossed the bridge, and hastening his steps reached the Place de la Révolution, which at that hour was filled with loungers from the boulevards, curious to see the preparations for the *fête*. Under a sky studded with stars, the immense space lay extended before him, with its stands already decked with flowers; its masts connected by garlands of foliage and coloured glass; its flags, and plumes, and banners floating in the wind.

Here and there fiddlers, standing on chairs, taught to choirs of young girls and young men the new anthem by Gossec, to be sung at the *fête*, a hymn to the Supreme Being, composed specially for the occasion. Some, carried away by their enthusiasm, followed up the hymn with a waltz or a gavotte.

Olivier opened his eyes in astonishment, asking himself if all this was real, or if he was in an ex-



travagant dream. On one side he saw but sorrow, on the other only joy! On one side, tears, despair, and the scaffold; on the other, laughter, revelry, and flowers! And the laughter and flowers were to honour and glorify the very one who was the cause of all this misery, who tore children relentlessly from the arms of their mothers as he sent them to death!

At this very moment the abhorred name fell on his ears: "Robespierre! . . . There's Robespierre!" he heard the crowd whispering.

He turned round and saw some of them looking curiously at a man who was crossing the square, seemingly in great haste, with a woman leaning on his arm. Olivier understood that it was the Incorruptible who was passing within barely an arm's length of him! He watched him disappear in the crowd.

They were right; it was Robespierre, who had been enjoying a walk in the Champs-Élysées with Cornélie Duplay. Returning home to supper, at Duplay's house in the Rue Saint-Honoré, he could not resist crossing the square to have a foretaste of the rejoicings in honour of *his fête*, to contemplate behind the curtain the scene of his approaching triumph. Cornélie had just said to him in delight, indicating the dancing groups, —

"The people seem to be devoted to it, heart and soul."

This flattered Robespierre's pride, who rewarded her with a gentle pressure of the arm.

They continued their walk, deep in their own thoughts. Cornélie was wondering if her dress would be at home when she arrived, that beautiful dress for the *fête*, confided on this special occasion to a private dressmaker. Robespierre, always suspicious and alert, was asking himself if he had done well to listen to her, and thus cross the Place de la Révolution at the risk of suggesting to the Committee of Public Safety the idea, absurd in itself, that he had wished to attract the notice of the populace.

The couple now reached the door of the Duplays, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, and Robespierre stepped aside gallantly for Cornélie to pass in.

At the same moment Olivier, who had stopped in deep thought at the Place de la Révolution, retraced his steps homeward, fired with a sudden resolution for the morrow.

“I will be at that *fête*,” he said.

And the dark night swallowed him.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FÊTE OF THE SUPREME BEING

THE Duplays' house, in which Robespierre lodged, was situated in the Rue Saint-Honoré, opposite the Church of the Assumption. The front door opened on to a large vaulted passage littered with planks propped up against the wall. At the end of this a small courtyard was formed by the quadrangular shape of the two-storied house. The first floor was occupied by the Duplay couple and their two daughters, Cornélie and Victoire. The ground floor was divided into three rooms, including the dining-room and the drawing-room. Robespierre lived in a room on the first floor of the left wing, which formed one side of the quadrangle. The ground floor of this wing, along which ran a shed, was used by the old Duplay as a carpenter's workshop. Robespierre's window was above the carpenter's shed, one room, and his quarters were connected with the main building by means of a wooden staircase, which led from his room to the dining-room. He was thus well guarded on one side by the Duplay family, as he was on the other by young Maurice Duplay and Simon, the wooden-

legged, who occupied two rooms on a line with Robespierre's, which also looked on to the shed.

It would have been certainly difficult for Robespierre to find a house more suited to his craving for an ostentatious display of Republican simplicity. The joiner's bench, the planks and tools littering the courtyard, the shed full of workmen during the day, sawing, piecing, and planing; the personal appearance of old Duplay, who only put aside his apron to come to table, or to go to the Jacobin Club, at which he was a constant attendant, or to the Revolutionary Tribunal, where he acted as deputy jurymen — all this marked the simple and industrious surroundings in which he lived.

Two of his colleagues at the Convention had been lately received in the courtyard by Cornélie Duplay, who was hanging out some stockings to dry; and Robespierre had enjoyed their surprise from the window of his room, where he was shaving himself. He was suspected of aiming at the Dictatorship! Was he? And this was the spectacle which met the astonished eyes of visitors who surprised him in his private life!

Robespierre and Cornélie had been received at the door by Blount, who barked and gambolled with joy at his master's return. The Duplay family, cooling themselves in the courtyard, were awaiting their return.

“Here they are at last!” some one cried.

It was mother Duplay, seated in the background

under the dining-room window, washing a salad under the pump, her sleeves tucked up to the elbow, all ears for the slightest sound.

“But we are not late, mamma!” said Cornélie, who had prudently stopped to avoid being splashed.

“Not so very,” answered the good woman, “but one never knows what may happen in such a crowd!” And looking towards Robespierre, from whom Victoire was taking his hat and stick, she added: “You can’t help being anxious about people you love. Can you?”

But Robespierre was for the moment entirely occupied with his dog, who barked and jumped on his master in frantic delight.

“Yes, you good old dog, here I am! . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . . I could n’t take you with me, because of the crowd. It is n’t fit for a good dog like you.”

“Then there were many people?” asked Duplay, who smoked his pipe, seated on a joiner’s bench near little Maurice, his son, who was amusing himself by planing a small plank.

“Yes, a great many.”

“An enormous crowd,” added Cornélie, “particularly on the Place de la Révolution.”

“What! You crossed the Place de la Révolution?”

Robespierre hastened to explain that Cornélie had had a fancy to come that way, which was, after all, excusable, as the people were dancing.

“What! Already?” asked Victoire, her eyes sparkling.

“Yes, already!” said Robespierre.

And he told them all about their walk through the strange crowd, so lively and so full of enthusiasm, turning now and then to Cornélie for corroboration. But Cornélie wore an absent air, replying only in monosyllables, for she had just learnt that her dress had not yet arrived; though she took some comfort on hearing that her sisters were in no better plight.

Mother Duplay, with arms akimbo, lingered to listen with enraptured interest to Robespierre’s narrative.

“I said as much to Duplay! It will be a triumph.”

Duplay here interrupted her.

“Well, are we to have supper to-night?”

“You may well ask, but when Maximilien talks I forget everything.”

Then taking up her basket of salad, she called Victoire to help her. They used to dine out of doors when the weather was fine; the table was already there, and had only to be laid. Ah! that *fête* — how it turned everybody’s head! Mother Duplay was certainly late, to her great discomfiture. Yes, she was late — she, the pink of punctuality.

“And the chicken will be burnt to a cinder!”

She ran to the kitchen, on the ground floor, next to the dining room, and found her youngest daughter, Madame Lebas, already there.

“I thought of it, mamma!” she said.

The chicken, nicely cooked to a golden brown, swimming in gravy, was ready to be served.

“Now then! Let us make haste!” said Madame Duplay, highly amused at being caught by her daughter. “Strain the soup while I prepare the salad. Oh, Victoire, we haven’t laid the cloth yet!”

With the Duplays, it was a long-established custom that everything connected with the kitchen or the table should be entrusted only to the family; the maid washed up when the meal was over. Perhaps this was an excess of prudence, or a fear of poison. Whatever the motive was, Robespierre highly approved the practice.

“It is well to know what one is eating,” he would often say.

The two girls and Madame Lebas took it in turns to wait at table, and so they could all speak freely, without being restrained by the presence of the servant.

The soup was now served up, steaming hot, and Madame Lebas was ladling it out in equal portions, reserving the last, as the hottest, for Robespierre.

“To table! To table!” she cried, placing chairs for every one.

But Robespierre and Duplay did not move. They were deeply interested in something Lebas was telling them. Duplay’s son-in-law had just returned from the Tuileries, where he had gone

“to feel the pulse of the Convention,” as he expressed it. The National Assembly, although undermined by some evil-minded members, would be excellently represented at the *fête* on the morrow. The abominable rogues who had charged Robespierre with intending to turn this popular manifestation to his own profit had been disappointed — an appropriate reward for their drivelling calumny! No one attached the slightest importance to their scandalous reports. The Convention, as well as the people, were with Robespierre. Only the Committee of Public Safety . . .

“But, I say, children, the soup will be cold,” Madame Duplay called out in desperation.

Simon the wooden-legged came down from his room, declaring that he was famished.

“Here we are! Here we are!” the three men exclaimed, taking their seats.

Robespierre had made a sign to Lebas to change the conversation on account of the women. Then significantly shrugging his shoulders, he whispered to him —

“The Committee of Public Safety? Well, I shall be ready for them!”

At table Robespierre, who was seated between Monsieur and Madame Duplay, hardly tasted his soup.

“The soup does n’t please you, friend?”

“Oh yes! Very good! Excellent!”

Victoire cleared away the soup plates as slowly as



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possible, waiting for Robespierre. When he had finished, she said —

“That is right, *bon ami*. You know you have to keep up your strength for to-morrow.”

Madame Lebas now returned from the kitchen with the capon, and was greeted by a general murmur of admiration.

“Splendid!” cried Simon Duplay, who was a bit of a gourmand.

“To-morrow, children, you shall have duck, duck and turnips!” said Madame Duplay, much gratified, as she set to work to carve the fowl, giving Robespierre the white meat, which he took mechanically, deep in thought. Lebas told them that he had seen Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, who was returning from the Bastille, where he had been to inspect the new installation.

“Ah, yes! the guillotine!” interposed mother Duplay, continuing to carve. “But it did n’t work to-day, did it?”

“It will not work to-morrow either,” said Robespierre, “but the day after to-morrow . . .”

“Will you allude to it in your discourse, *bon ami*?”

“Yes, towards the end; for it is well that the aristocrats should know that we are not disarming.”

“Decidedly,” chimed in Duplay, “that would be too stupid.”

Robespierre, warmed by the tone of the conversation, recovered his appetite.

“At all events,” he said, “the *fête* to-morrow will be a warning for every one; for the aristocrats, as well as for many a Judas of the party.”

He stopped to express his appreciation of the fowl, sending up his plate for more.

“A leg, or a wing?” asked mother Duplay, delighted.

Robespierre suddenly turned round. He had heard a noise.

“I am sure the front door has just been opened,” he said.

Simon Duplay took out a match to light a lamp, and young Maurice rose, looking out into the dark.

“It’s true,” he said; “it’s a woman with a large parcel.”

“Our dresses, surely!” exclaimed Cornélie, who had been somewhat morose and silent until then.

“Yes, our dresses,” cried Madame Lebas and Victoire expectantly.

It was, after all, only the dresses, which the dress-maker had at last brought. The enormous box was handled by them eagerly; they wished to open it there and then. However, Victoire, prudently fearing to soil the contents, carried it into the dining-room, followed by her sisters.

The conversation was resumed with lively interest by the light of the lamp just lit, and opinions were freely expressed that as Royalty had her *fêtes*, the world would now see what a Republican *fête* could

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be like. It would be truly national, imposing, and symbolical.

The young women had not yet returned.

"Hullo! you children! what are you doing there?" called out old Duplay.

"Here we are! Here we are!" answered Victoire, appearing that moment on the threshold of the dining-room in a pretty white dress, coquettishly pushing back her hair, disordered by her hasty toilet.

"Does n't it suit me?" she said. "Oh! don't look at my hair; it is n't arranged," and she ran down the steps followed by Madame Lebas and Cornélie, also arrayed in their new finery.

Mother Duplay scolded her daughters.

"What! You dressed yourselves in the dining-room? Why, it is positively improper! Is n't it, Maximilien?"

Robespierre smiled.

"Let them alone, *bonne mère*. It's not *fête* every day!"

And he looked at the dresses, pronouncing them charming, and in perfect taste.

Madame Lebas was in blue, Victoire in white, and Cornélie in red.

"The three colours!" observed the boy Maurice.

"We wanted to give you a surprise," said Cornélie, advancing towards Robespierre.

"Nothing could have given me more pleasure," he replied. "That is what I call true patriotism."

The noise of hurrying feet, the sound of voices

and music, the hum of Paris in the distance preparing for the coming *fête*, entered through the open window. Fireworks burst in mid-air, then suddenly seemed to radiate in a blaze of glory.

“Oh, look!” exclaimed the boy Maurice, as showers of golden fire fell in a cascade of light. Robespierre musingly watched their slow descent, which to his overstrained imagination took the form of one huge halo of glory.

Robespierre was early up and dressed next morning, and he was received by the Duplays in the courtyard with cries of surprise, for it was scarcely nine o'clock. “What! dressed already! And we have n't commenced!”

Robespierre told them he had hastened in order to be at the Tuileries in time to superintend things a bit, and to arrange matters with his friends, that there might be no hitch. People would talk so! The slightest thing might mar the splendour of the manifestation, which would be a pity on such a splendid day!

“The sky is naturally propitious for the *fête* of the Supreme Being,” said Victoire; “but you will have some breakfast, I suppose?”

“No, I shall breakfast over there.”

They now surrounded him, retaining him to arrange the folds of his cravat, or brush grains of powder from the revers of his coat, which they all declared suited him to perfection. He received the compliment with visible pleasure, as he had given

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himself no little trouble over his toilet for the great occasion.

He wore a light blue coat, nankeen breeches buttoned above the knees, where a stream of tri-colour ribbons was attached. White silk stockings and buckled shoes completed the array of this real Republican dandy. He was powdered of course, as usual, and had even indulged in an extra puff or so, but his most extravagant conceit was displayed in the lace waistcoat which spread like a filmy foam across his breast. The women went into ecstasies over this, and declared his taste exquisite. As he was taking leave, Cornélie appeared with an enormous bouquet of wild flowers and ears of corn in her hand.

“And the bouquet?” she asked, giving it to him at the same time.

“Ah! yes! I had forgotten it. How kind you are! *Au revoir*. I shall see you by and by, looking your best, I am sure!”

And Robespierre, spick and span in his new clothes, all curled and perfumed, picked his way daintily across the courtyard.

At the door he found Lebas, Simon the wooden-legged, and the boy Maurice Duplay awaiting him. They wished to escort him to the Tuileries. Didier, the agent, now came up, accompanied by two of his men, and they all started in the direction of the Rue Saint-Honoré, keeping to the right. The Incorruptible conversed with Lebas.

A breeze stirred the flowers that decorated the front of the houses, wafting abroad their perfume. People were filling the streets from all directions, all in festive attire, with palms and ears of corn in their hands. On recognising the Incorruptible, they bowed to him; delighted, he discreetly returned their salutations.

Robespierre had turned into the Passage des Feuillantes, and found himself on the terrace. Here a surprise awaited him. The garden was already, at that early hour, three-quarters full, looking like an immense sea with wave upon wave of tricolour ribbons, plumes, and cockades. He continued his way along the Terrace des Feuillantes, a smile on his lips, returning the greetings as he went, and then joined the stream of people moving towards the Tuileries, happy to lose himself in that crowd flocking to his own apotheosis.

Flowers festooned the front of the Palace from end to end, lending to it the freshness of spring-tide.

When Robespierre arrived he cast a hasty glance at the vast amphitheatre which awaited the National Convention. It was still empty. The amphitheatre extended from the gardens to the balcony of the Horloge, from which projected a tribune, erected above the seats of the deputies — the tribune of the President, his tribune. It was from there that he would speak to the people, assembled to hear and to applaud him.

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Robespierre entered the Palace alone, Lebas and the two Duplays having gone back to the Rue Saint-Honoré to fetch the family. Beaming with expectation, the Incorruptible looked about in search of some familiar faces, but he found none. He crossed the Convention Chamber to the offices of the Committee of Public Safety, and questioned the men in charge, who told him that only the members Barère, Collot d'Herbois, Prieur, and Carnot had put in an appearance for a moment, and then had gone to breakfast at a restaurant. As he crossed the Hall of Liberty he met Vilate, a fellow-juryman of Duplay's on the Revolutionary Tribunal. Vilate was under an obligation to Robespierre, who, in conjunction with Barère, had procured for him a residence in the Palace at the Flora Pavilion. It was the surest way of having a spy ready at hand, a reliable and silent witness of every act and move of the Committee of Public Safety. Vilate, at once insinuating and deferential, invited him to breakfast.

"It would be so convenient," he suggested, for he could breakfast, and yet not lose the splendid spectacle of the crowd as seen from the first story. Robespierre accepted the invitation, and remained for two hours there. Even after Vilate had left him he stayed on, looking down on all the preparations, lost in a day-dream of anticipated joy. He was nearing the supreme moment, the popular moment, which would raise him so high above his colleagues that henceforth any steps taken against

him would be considered as directed against the nation itself. He smiled. His dictatorship? Was it not imposed on him by the French people? Was it not the outcome of the public will? It would be presently called for by a hundred thousand voices in these very gardens, in presence of all France, represented by the three hundred deputies of the Convention. He remained in meditation, smiling still, his forehead pressed against a pane of the window, his looks plunged in that living sea swaying at his feet. If ever Robespierre was happy, it was at this supreme moment.

Some one knocked.

“Come in!” he said, as if awakened from a dream.

It was Lebas, who, all out of breath, came to tell him that the Convention was assembled, and only awaited his arrival.

“Vilate sent me here. I was wondering where to find you.”

Robespierre looked up in astonishment.

“It can't be very late,” he said.

“Why, it is half-past twelve!”

“Half-past twelve?”

The *fête* had been fixed for noon. He was then half an hour behind time! And the ironical smiles of some of his colleagues when he appeared in the tribune were not the least bitter consequences of his unpunctuality.

A voice was heard saying —



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“He has at last decided to put in an appearance!”

And then another —

“He has n’t even the courtesy of kings, yet he has enough of their insolence!”

Robespierre recognised the voice.

It was Barère’s. Drops of gall were already falling into his cup of joy. But as the people began to applaud at the lower end of the gardens, Robespierre advanced to the edge of the tribune, and bowed. The expectant crowd swayed as one man towards him, unwilling to lose a single gesture or a single word. So stood the Incorruptible, enwrapped and penetrated by the inebriating vapours of adulation and the perfume of all the palms and bouquets that rose as incense at his feet.

But again a discordant note was touched, and another voice was heard —

“See how like a throne the tribune stands!”

And in fact, set high above the steps, it did seem raised on a pedestal. Robespierre felt this as in some embarrassment he unfolded his manuscript, and commenced. His voice was almost inaudible, except to the members of the Convention seated near him. Passages on which he counted most passed unheeded, and he felt the encouragement of his friends to be indiscriminate and misplaced, like that of some theatre claque.

When he had finished he was greeted with considerable applause, that was more formal than

genuine ; it mounted from the gardens and reached him, mingled with the strains of Gossec's hymn, just started by the Opéra choir. Robespierre left the tribune dissatisfied with himself, but convinced that his address to the people on the Place de la Révolution, from the altar of flowers erected at the foot of the statue of Liberty, would retrieve this first failure. There he would be in direct contact with people, and then they would see ! For he felt the people were with him ; their acclamation coming up to him from the gardens was proof enough.

He descended the steps, followed by the Convention, and went towards the first fountain on the lawn, from which rose an allegorical group, representing Atheism surrounded by the Vices, led by Folly, while Wisdom, standing apart, pointed a warning finger at the group. He was to set a match to this ingenious specimen of artistic pyrotechny, when Atheism was supposed to disappear, dragged down by Folly and the Vices, leaving Wisdom alone, radiantly triumphant. But it was the very opposite that happened. Wisdom caught fire and upset the whole arrangement, provoking disrespectful laughter among the deputies.

Robespierre turned pale. The *fête* had certainly not opened auspiciously. Then, in spite of himself, an instinctive and uncontrollable desire to lean on some one, which always took possession of him in hours of suffering, mastered him. As he looked round in search of a sympathising glance, his eyes

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fell on a fair, rosy child, in its young mother's arms, trying to play with bouquets of corn and wild flowers which its mother kept from him. Robespierre recognised the bouquet which in his excitement he had left on the tribune, and which the young woman now held out to him. This delicate attention fell on his parched soul like refreshing dew, and he gratefully accepted the simple homage offered with such charming frankness.

Robespierre now headed the procession, preceded by trumpets and drums, followed by the Convention through the line of National Guards, who kept back the curious crowd on either side of the garden, as the line wound its way towards the swing-bridge which opened on to the Place de la Révolution.

The deputies were all there, dressed in official garb: dark blue coat, red collar and cuffs, tight-fitting knee breeches of doeskin, high boots, broad tricolour sashes across the breast, fastened on the left shoulder, and tricolour plumes in their hats. Each member carried in his hand a bouquet of flowers and ears of corn.

Robespierre was conspicuous by the difference in his attire, which was of a lighter blue. He walked well ahead of his colleagues, as if to accentuate the distance between himself and them in the eyes of the crowd, who, with keen curiosity, were climbing on stools, on ladders, on the bases of statues, on gates, and even on the trees, to get a better view of him. Thus Robespierre, whose serenity had now returned,

advanced towards the Place de la Révolution, where he knew that the greater mass of the people were assembled to receive him with thunders of applause.

The sound of "*Vivat! Vivat!*" was heard in the distance, accompanied by the roll of the Champ-de-Mars cannon, which fired a resounding salute at regular intervals. Those *vivas* were welcoming on the Place de la Révolution the *cortège* which had preceded Robespierre and the members of the Convention; the delegates from the different sections of Paris, who entered amidst the beat of drums and blare of brass instruments, headed by a standard-bearer. The procession had no sooner reached the square than they parted into two lines; on one side women and young girls, dressed in white and crowned with roses; on the other, old men and youths, carrying branches of oak and laurel. The crowd, kept back by a rope of tricolour ribbons, received the procession with enthusiastic shouts, chanting with the choirs the choruses of the *Chant du Départ*. To the passionate strains of Mehul's national anthem succeeded soon after a hymn appropriate to the occasion, Gossec's composition calling down the benediction of the Supreme Being on France and on humanity.

The people applauded, but stopped directly to welcome another group of the Paris section, a company of young Republican warriors dressed in blue and rose-colour, holding aloft lances decked with tricolour ribbons. The greatest triumph of all,

however, was the group symbolising the Four Ages — Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age — represented by a multitude of children, youths, maidens, men and women, both middle-aged and old, some crowned with violets, others with myrtle, oak-leaves, olive-branches, and vine-leaves. One unanimous cry of admiration rose from the crowd and resounded through the immense square, where the sun fell in burning rays on the silks, velvets, and brocades, playing in the gold fringe of flags and banners, and on the many tricolour ribbons and streamers, in a flood of dazzling light.

The excitement of the populace was now at its height, and, as the members of the Convention appeared in sight, a cry rose suddenly —

“He is here !”

“Who ?”

“Robespierre.”

A tremor of curiosity ran through the crowd who, mad with excitement, poured forth their welcome in a storm of enthusiastic cheers and plaudits, even before their hero came in sight. A sheriff, then a delegate, then a master of ceremonies, were by turns loudly cheered by the eager multitude, who in their impatience had taken them for the Incorruptible. At last he passed, smiling affably, hat in his hand, and the cry ran from mouth to mouth —

“It is he ! It is he !”

This time it was really Robespierre ; there was no mistake. Hats, caps, handkerchiefs, waved on

all sides; women raised sprays of roses in the air and men branches of palm.

This outburst threatened to break up the *cortège* of the Four Ages, which, like the preceding one, had ranged itself round the statute of Liberty, where Robespierre was to deliver his discourse. Children begged their mothers to lift them up, that they might see also. At the same moment the solemn chords of a harp floated on the air.

Robespierre advanced slowly, slackening his pace, for he had become suddenly aware of the great distance which separated him from the deputies, who filed into the square six abreast, grave and slow, like judges. The different groups of the procession, who had arranged themselves in regular lines, now unveiled the statute of Liberty, where an altar of flowers and foliage had been erected. It was at this altar that Robespierre was to officiate, and consecrate amidst the burning of incense the worship of the Supreme Being.

The Incorruptible was now passing the very spot where on the previous day the scaffold still stood. A woman in the crowd called attention to this in all simplicity. But her voice was quickly drowned by a hundred harps, whose dulcet music filled the air. All members of the Convention had reached the Place de la Révolution, when a new *cortège* came in sight, the chariot of Agriculture, draped in blue, covered with garlands of roses, and drawn by a yoke of oxen with gilded horns. The goddess of Agri-

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culture was impersonated by a beautiful girl from the Opéra, who smiled on the crowd with her light blue eyes, looking the very incarnation of luxuriant youth, her blonde beauty framed in ripe golden corn and fruits of the rich harvest.

Robespierre, now standing before the altar, was burning incense in a golden tripod, amidst the mute reverence of the crowd, who behaved as if assisting at some religious ceremony. Presently, descending the steps of the altar, he turned to address the multitude.

All music had ceased, each voice was silenced, every whisper hushed ; even the cries of pedlars and street-hawkers were unheard. A hundred thousand eyes were fixed on Robespierre, who, set up on high and wrapped in clouds of incense, appeared to tower in stature, to dominate that mass of human beings with all the force of a prevailing pride.

A sudden inspiration seized him : he would repeat the more notable phrases of his former discourse, here, to that crowd whose mighty heart he felt beating with his own ; he would have his revenge, and hear his burning words applauded by the nation itself ! Ah ! had the deputies been indifferent, cold, hesitating in their applause ? Well, they should receive a lesson that would be at once a warning and a mandate ! The delegates of the nation should be censured publicly by the very nation they represented !

Robespierre had delivered the opening sentences

of his speech. Carried away by the enthusiastic ovation of the crowd, now entirely master of himself and of his discourse, his words flowed freely and abundantly, and he declaimed without once referring to his notes, in a clear, penetrating voice. Every point was greeted with a thunder of applause as he spoke on, stimulated by a glow of satisfaction which touched the most secret fibres of his being. He felt himself to be for ever and in very deed master of France, acclaimed Dictator, solely by the people's will. Through the fumes of this mad delirium he saw the Convention vanquished, paralysed with fear and amazement.

He was thanking the French nation, who had laid aside their work to lift their thoughts and aspirations towards the Great, the Supreme Being.

“Never,” exclaimed the Incorruptible, “never has this world which He created offered Him a sight more worthy of His regard. He has seen the reign of tyranny, crime, and imposture on the earth——”

But a stir was noticeable in the crowd, not far from Robespierre. A man had just made an observation in an audible whisper, attracting the attention of the bystanders. They looked at him in surprise, trying to divine his meaning, but Robespierre, who was too far off to have heard, continued —

“Frenchmen! if you would triumph over your enemies, be just, give to the Divine Being the



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only offerings worthy of Him — virtue, compassion, forbearance — ”

“With the guillotine!” called the voice in the crowd, with a bitter laugh.

A murmur rose round the man, every one whispering out of respect for Robespierre, who continued his harangue. They questioned the man, threatened him. Voices grew louder. “Silence!” called the officials, but the disturbance went on. “He ought to be arrested!” and the words drunkard, aristocrat, *chouan*, were thrown at him. “What did he want? What did he say?”

“Yes, what did you say?” asked a patriot coming close to him.

“I say only what you ought all to cry out to that charlatan — ‘Instead of burning incense to your idol, Tyrant, burn the guillotine!’”

This daring critic, as the reader will guess at once, was Olivier.

His voice was drowned in a burst of applause which greeted the words of Robespierre encouraging him to go on with his speech.

In presence of such irony Olivier lost all self-control.

“And they can applaud him, the fools! They can applaud him!”

The fury of the multitude, now unchained, knew no bounds. Cries of “To death with him! To death!” were heard amidst the awful tumult, which completely drowned the voice of Robespierre,

whose anxiety was now also aroused. Olivier, down-trodden, his clothes torn to tatters, fought and struggled in the grasp of twenty or more of the infuriated populace. "He must be killed! He is an aristocrat! A *chouan*! To death with him!" One of the patriots lifted a be-ribboned spike in the air, threatening to pierce his eyes. But a man armed to the teeth, dagger and pistols in his belt, pushed aside the crowd and seized the offender by the throat. He then turned and bade them make way for the officers of the peace who followed him.

"Stand back there!" he cried. "This man is to be dealt with by justice only!"

It was Héron, chief police-agent of the Committee of Public Safety.

With the assistance of his men Héron dragged the offender to the feet of Robespierre, who, being informed of the affair, had asked to see the interruptor.

But a vociferating crowd obstructed the passage. Robespierre impatiently descended the steps of the altar. The whole Convention and the *cortège* had moved also, wishing to see. The police forced a way in the crowd for Robespierre. At the name of the Incorruptible the multitude gave way, and Olivier appeared before him, struggling in the powerful grasp of Héron.

"Against whom does this madman, who disturbs our *fête*, bear a grudge?" asked Robespierre.

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“Against you! hypocrite and scoundrel!” Olivier cried; “against you, who dare speak of justice and humanity on this spot soaked with the blood you have spilled!”

A horrified scream rose from the crowd, but was as soon hushed at a sign from Robespierre. Olivier tried to throw himself on him, but was held back by the police.

“Look at the soles of your shoes, you butcher!” he cried desperately. “They are red with blood!”

He was not allowed to continue.

The Incorruptible motioned the agents to remove him out of reach of the furious and exasperated crowd, who continued to cry out—

“To death with him! To death!”

Olivier turned in the grasp of his gaolers and cried—

“You can kill me, murder me, ruffians! but I have cried out, as others will cry out after me, ‘Down with the scaffold!’”

His words were lost in the tumult. Robespierre reascended the steps of the statue, and tried to calm the people.

“Citizens!” he said, “let us give ourselves up to the joys of this *fête*, which the insults and outrages of a rebel shall not disturb! To-morrow the sword of Justice will strike with renewed ardour the enemies of our country!”

Loud plaudits followed, and cries of “Long live

the Republic! Long live Robespierre! Long live the Incorruptible!”

“Down with the scaffold!” cried a faint voice in the distance.

It was Olivier, whom the police, aided by the National Guards, were carrying away in chains.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN EVENING AT THE DUPLAYS'

ROBESPIERRE slowly descended the altar steps with a preoccupied air, for that last desperate cry of Olivier had struck its mark. However self-possessed he might be, he had felt the blow acutely. That voice, full of hatred and revenge, had risen from the crowd he thought entirely at one with him! In their very applause at that moment the people were protesting against an insult coming from their ranks! They were driven to defend him, when he had dreamt that the populace would receive him with instant and unanimous enthusiasm, insuring to him for ever the esteem of France!

Pale and anxious, he followed the procession to the Champ de Mars, where the *fête* was to close with one crowning patriotic demonstration. He felt that his supremacy was tottering, and wondered how many more discordant notes would disturb the prevailing harmony. Alas! there were already signs of jarring discord. Certain members of the Convention talked aloud in a free, sarcastic strain, on the road, openly exchanging opinions, emboldened by Olivier's public insult. Words of dark and ominous import reached the ears of Robespierre —

words of hatred and scorn, of tragic foreboding, and portentous prophecy. "I despise and hate him!" said one. "There is but one step from the Tarpeian Rock to the Capitol!" said another. And a third added: "A Brutus may yet arise!" To close the mouths of these backbiters, he mentally reflected, and to save all, nothing was wanted but the *vox populi*, the supreme and national mandate, uprising from the assembled multitude and re-echoed through the whole of France: "Robespierre Dictator! Dictator for life!" But the Incorruptible awaited any such acclaim in vain.

The *fête* of the Champ de Mars which followed was wanting in the brilliancy and magnificence of the preceding festival. Every one was hot and unstrung. Robespierre again addressed the people, who, tired from having stood so long under a burning sun, were listless and absent-minded. The demonstration was drawing to its close amidst a general feeling of depression.

Nothing but confusion reigned on the march homeward. Robespierre was to return to the Tuileries to meet several of his colleagues, but instead, he hurried away, fully resolved to shut himself up in his room and open his door to no one, not even to the Duplays, who had dogged his steps the whole way back, trying to catch him up, and only succeeding at the threshold of their house, where Robespierre begged them to have their little festive party without him.

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"I want rest," he said.

"The *fête* went very well, didn't it?" asked mother Duplay.

"Yes, very well!" replied Robespierre.

"Then you are satisfied?"

"Perfectly!"

As Cornélie began to tell him of some details which she thought had escaped him, he put her off gently, saying —

"Was it so? Indeed! Well, you will tell me that to-morrow."

"What! You will not dine with us?"

"No; I must ask to be excused."

And as she pressed him to join them, he repeated —

"No, no; I must beg you to excuse me! *Au revoir* till to-morrow! *Au revoir!*"

With these words he went up to his room and locked himself in.

Every one was in low spirits at the Duplays' that evening. They scarcely tasted their supper. No one was deceived by Robespierre's feigned indisposition; they were well aware that the *fête* had been a great disappointment to him, and they shared his chagrin, though they determined that this should be in no way apparent.

"We must not disturb his meditations," observed mother Duplay.

"But are we not going to see the fireworks?" asked the boy Maurice anxiously.

“We are not,” declared mother Duplay. “How could we enjoy ourselves without him?”

And they went early to bed.

The house, which had awakened to joy, now slumbered silently whilst Paris was being lit up to prepare for the populace, again in holiday mood, the promised display of fireworks.

Robespierre rejoined the Duplays next day at supper. He had spent the morning and afternoon locked in his room, under pretext of working. And work he did. Alone, in sullen silence, he prepared that atrocious Prairial law, which he intended to lay before Convention forthwith — a law which aimed at nothing less than the entire suppression of the right of defence before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Moral evidence was to suffice; cross-examinations, depositions, and the testimony of witnesses were to be done away with. To be a “suspect” would itself be a proof of guilt.

Ah! he had been insulted! Well, this was his reply to the insult. He had wished to establish his dictatorship under conditions of peace, but the great pacific demonstration had not availed him. Were these cowards only to be subjugated by terror? They should have it then, with renewed vigour, in a whirlwind of tempestuous violence carrying everything before it. It should be a fearful and memorable lesson! Every trace of those stubborn, headstrong rebels should be swept away by the stroke of its formidable wing!



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This law, drafted entirely by him, with its every villainy cunningly concealed, or placed in the light of a sacred duty, and as the only means of assuring public safety, Robespierre would himself lay before the Convention. The deputies, who had been insulted in the person of their President by that brawling meddler arrested on the Place de la Révolution, could not but pass the law, after such a scandalous scene. That public insult of the riotous rebel was an excellent pretext. It would help him to take them by surprise, to wring from them the vote which would place entirely at his mercy not only his rivals who had expressed their opinions so freely, but also that rude scoffer, already doomed to die.

His trial would not last long! But before his death he should be brought before Robespierre. He should lay bare the most secret recesses of his soul, denounce his accomplices, and disclose his connections and parentage. Such an insult, the cruellest Robespierre had as yet sustained, demanded an exemplary penalty. The death of the man himself would not suffice; he should pay with the heads of every one connected with him in any way — accomplices, friends, and relations. Ah! the wretch, he had sacrificed not only his own life, but the lives of all near and dear to him!

Pondering still on the cross-examination he would so soon be able to enforce, Robespierre descended into the dining-room, where the family had assembled for supper. The table had not been laid out-

of-doors, partly on account of the uncertain weather, but more especially to divert Robespierre's attention, by a change of surroundings, from the remembrance of the last two days, and to turn into a fresh channel the secret thoughts of their good friend, which they felt still dwelt on the failure of his inauguration.

Robespierre found the family so bright and affable that his reappearance was not embarrassing. He had but to explain vaguely the cause of his indisposition, which was quite gone. Oh, yes! every one could see that! Why, he looked so well, so full of life! What a good thing it was, after all, to have had a day's rest!

But this conspiracy of smiles, which had put him at his ease so quickly, soon began to irritate him. The whole family racked their brains to find scraps of news and items of interest outside the one all-absorbing subject of his thoughts. When the dessert came on, however, Robespierre himself turned the conversation to the carefully avoided theme, and asked their candid opinion of the previous day's *fête*.

As they resorted to evasions, giving a host of details to escape the main question, he asked them plainly what they thought of his personal success.

"It was gigantic!" said Madame Duplay.

"Ah, that's a woman's answer — a mother's!" he replied sadly.

And longing for sympathy, he opened his heart to them; he had been disappointed in his dearest hopes;

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everything must begin over again. Lebas interrupted him.

“You exaggerate, I think.”

Robespierre replied calmly —

“I am so far from exaggerating that I have passed the whole day in preparing my revenge.”

Here they were interrupted by a knock at the door, and young Duplay rose to open it.

“Ah! it is Buonarotti!” they all exclaimed. “What a pleasant surprise!”

But it was not a surprise at all. The demoiselles Duplay had invited Buonarotti to supper, a valuable and ever-welcome guest, in so far that he played the harpsichord to perfection, and used to accompany Lebas, who was always ready to show his talent on the violin. Buonarotti was an original character, a Corsican by birth, claiming descent from Michaël-Angelo. He was an ardent revolutionist, and an enthusiastic admirer of Robespierre. He had begged to be excused from accepting the invitation to dinner, but promised to come in afterwards to cheer up his friend.

The family took advantage of his entrance to leave the table and move to the drawing-room, where music was soon started, in spite of the terrible longing Buonarotti had to talk politics, and to give Robespierre an account of the different opinions of the *fête* which he had picked up here and there. But they had dragged him coaxingly to the harpsichord, laying a sonata of Mozart before him, of

which Lebas had already struck the first bars on his violin.

In no other apartment was the hero-worship of the Duplays more evident than in this drawing-room, with its furniture covered in Utrecht velvet, where portraits of the Incorruptible faced each other in every conceivable form and position — on the walls, on the tables, on the brackets, and even on the harp-sichord; in crayon, water-colours, plaster-cast medallions, bronze, and terra-cotta. This was the sanctuary in which the Duplays loved to congregate under the auspices of their demigod. It was here they spent their evenings, when sometimes a few friends were admitted to the intimacy of the family circle. The young women, seated at the round table, would occupy themselves with sewing or embroidery, whilst the men conversed on one subject or another, more often suggested by some letters or reports among Robespierre's correspondence, which was usually sorted by Lebas or Duplay.

The hours were sometimes enlivened by music, and sometimes also by recitation. When there was music Lebas and Buonarotti carried off all the honours, but in recitation it was Robespierre who triumphed, for he had preserved from his youth the love of rhymed and sonorous phrases. As he had read aloud to himself long ago in his little room at the Hôtel de Pontivy the burning pages of "La Nouvelle Héloïse," so he read now, amidst these austere Republican surroundings, the tragedies of

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Corneille and of Racine, giving himself up to the magic sway of the rhythmic verse, a smile of appreciation on his lips.

But that evening he was quite preoccupied, and gave but little attention to the music, as he sat with his back to the mantelpiece, entirely absorbed in the voluminous correspondence which had just reached him — letters, reports, denunciations and the like. He sorted them feverishly, handing them one by one to Simon the wooden-legged, who stood near him, either to classify them or to throw them in the waste-paper basket. Mother Duplay, ensconced in a deep armchair, was indulging in her after-dinner nap, whilst old Duplay smoked his pipe, leaning on the window ledge to watch the departure of some of the workmen kept late over some pressing work. Young Maurice Duplay ran backwards and forwards from one group to another, as lively and active as a squirrel.

Buonarotti, still at the harpsichord, was now playing the hymn to the Supreme Being, by Gossec. The air fell on Robespierre's ears and brought back the previous day's *fête* to his memory: the procession from the gardens of the Tuileries; the affectation of the deputies in keeping so far behind him to make it appear that he had already assumed the *rôle* of Dictator; the whole plot which he felt was undermining the popular rejoicings; and the untoward scene of that final insult. All this and more was suggested by that hymn composed to celebrate his apotheosis, but reminding him to-day of his defeat.

His defeat! yes, nothing less than defeat! These anonymous letters, inspired by hatred and envy, proved it only too plainly, and it was emphasised by the reports of his police agents, in whose obsequious language a certain embarrassment could be detected.

Just then Didier, the chief agent, entered, bringing the latest news, and when Robespierre asked him his impression of the *fête*, he declared it to have been perfect.

“You are lying!” said Robespierre.

Brought to bay by the Incorruptible’s questions, the police agent owned the truth. The affair *had* been a disastrous failure. It was the fault of the organisers, of Didier’s own scouts. Every one, in fact, was to blame. The men hired to applaud had been imprudently paid in advance. They had drunk hard, lingered in the taverns, and only arrived on the scene when the *fête* was already compromised. Didier gave him other details, corroborating the reports which had just reached him, and opened his eyes to things ignored before. Robespierre was dumfounded on hearing of the audacious conduct of his enemies. He called Duplay, who was still at the window, to seek counsel with him. But Didier, emboldened by the interest which the Incorruptible took in his disclosures, ventured himself to proffer advice.

“Between ourselves,” he said, “the guillotine is becoming unpopular.”

And he confessed that the young fanatic’s cry of

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“Down with the scaffold!” at the *fête*, seemed to have been trembling on the lips of a considerable number of the spectators, who were more than half inclined to protect the insulter from the violence of the crowd.

“They are heartily sick of it,” he continued. “Another proof of this is the protest the inhabitants near the Bastille have been making against its erection there. The Committee of Public Safety had to see into the affair to-day in your absence, and have decided that the guillotine should be transported to the Barrière du Trône.”

This last piece of news exasperated Robespierre beyond measure. What! His colleagues of the Committee dared to take such an important step in his absence? And that, too, the very day after he had been publicly insulted! In truth, the moment was well chosen to show themselves ashamed of the scaffold! And as Robespierre questioned Duplay on the number of prisoners condemned during the day, he was astonished to learn that there were only fifteen. Had the Tribunal then been won over by the Conspiracy of the Lenient? However, the carpenter assured him that it was simply a coincidence, for he had heard Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor, remark at the conclusion of the sitting that if things continued at this rate there would never be an end of it. There were, it appeared, at that moment seven thousand prisoners under lock and key.

"Fouquier-Tinville is right," said Robespierre; "things move too slowly."

"But how can they go quicker?" asked Duplay, who regarded his juryman's duties as sacred.

"Have patience! I have my plans."

"May we hear them?"

"You shall know to-morrow. I must first of all make an example of that young fanatic, with whom it is time to deal."

And turning to Didier he asked —

"Where is he?"

"A few steps from here, at the police station of the Rue Saint-Florentin, where Héron has locked him up, pending your orders."

"Very well! Bid Héron bring him here; I wish to examine him instantly."

The peremptory tone admitted no reply. Didier, wishing the company good-night, left the room with Simon Duplay, whom the Incorruptible had charged with several messages, and Cornélie, taking advantage of their departure, called Robespierre to the harpsichord.

"And now, I hope you will take a little notice of us," she said, coming towards him in half petulant, half coquettish mood.

Robespierre, softening at her approach, kissed her hand. Only let him have the time to answer a letter from his friend Saint-Just, and he would be entirely at her disposal. And he seated himself at the round table to write. Only Buonarotti played



now. Lebas had laid down his violin, and whilst filling his pipe asked Robespierre for news of the Army of the North, where Saint-Just then was. All was going well there. Robespierre had also good news from his brother Augustin, then at Lyons, and on the point of returning. Augustin warmly recommended to him a young general of the artillery whom he had known at Nice, and who had already distinguished himself at Toulon.

“Augustin tells me that this young man could replace, to some advantage, that drunkard Hauriot as commander of the armed force of Paris.”

Buonarotti, who was still at the harpischord, turned at the mention of Toulon.

“Bonaparte?” he said.

Robespierre looked across. He knew him, then?

Yes, he knew him. They had lived together in Corsica. And as the Incorruptible asked what were the sentiments of the young soldier, he replied —

“Excellent. He is Republican to the core.”

“Well, we shall see,” said Robespierre, favourably inclined to a change, adverse as he was to the idea of a military commander remaining too long in the same post.

And he began his letter to Saint-Just, at the same time lending an ear to Lebas, who was telling Duplay of certain rumours coming from the army of the aspiration of some of its chiefs to the dictatorship. But Duplay interrupted him —

“*Sapristi!* I had almost forgotten!”

Robespierre raised his eyes inquiringly.

“I have a letter also to give you.”

“From whom?” asked the Incorruptible, reassured as soon as he knew it was only a letter.

“From a prisoner, I think, who very innocently confided it to one of our spies. It was given to me just now at the Tribunal.”

Duplay searched in his pockets, and having found the letter, handed it to Robespierre, who continued writing.

“Look at it with Lebas,” he said.

Lebas took the letter, and going to the mantelpiece, commenced to read it by the light of a candle. Duplay, in the act of filling his pipe, looked over his shoulder.

It was Clarisse’s letter to Robespierre, and read thus —

“I should not write to you if I had only my own life to plead for. But I have to protect that of two children, my niece imprisoned here with me and a son of nineteen years, who may be arrested at any moment and sent to the scaffold, and good God, by whom!

CLARISSE.”

Robespierre had now finished his letter to Saint-Just, and whilst closing it, asked —

“Well, and the letter?”

“It is a woman who supplicates you for her niece imprisoned with her,” answered Lebas.

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Robespierre, annoyed, stopped him, saying curtly that he received twenty such letters every day.

"She also supplicates you for her son," added Lebas, still perusing the note.

Robespierre simply shrugged his shoulders and sealed his letter to Saint-Just.

"Always the same refrain!" he said.

"Shall I throw it in the basket, then?"

"Yes, do, for goodness' sake!"

But Duplay took the letter from Lebas's hands, twisted it into a spill, and ignited it at the candle to light his pipe.

Robespierre now rose and went towards the harpsichord, where he was received with joyous exclamations.

"Here you are at last!"

Cornélie whispered a few words to Buonarotti, and placed a new piece of music before him.

"As a reward," she said, "Buonarotti will sing you one of his latest compositions."

"And the words are by a friend of yours," added Madame Lebas, with a mysterious air.

Robespierre, puzzled, asked the name of this friend, but Victoire wished him to guess, and when he demurred a battle of words ensued, in which his stronger will prevailed.

"Very well, then! We will tell you the poet's name."

And as he was all attention, they exclaimed in chorus —

“Maximilien Robespierre !”

The Incorruptible smiled. What were they talking about? He the author of a poem !”

“Yes.”

Before he had time to protest, Cornélie recited the first verse —

“*Crois-moi, jeune et belle Ophélie . . .*”

Ah, yes! They were right. Robespierre remembered the piece now. He had composed it at Arras, and read it in public before the Society of the Rosati, of which he was a member. He went on with the verse from memory, while Cornélie followed in the book —

“*Si flatteur que soit ton miroir,  
Sois charmante avec modestie,  
Fais semblant de n'en rien savoir.*”

What! had Buonarotti really set that to music? Robespierre was very curious to hear it.

“With pleasure!” said the Corsican.

Madame Lebas, seated at the piano, struck the first chord of the accompaniment, and Buonarotti commenced the song. Every one had gathered round the singer.

The first verse was greeted with loud applause.

Ah, how pretty it was! How well the music chimed in with the words! What simplicity! What grace!

Robespierre, delighted, joined in the chorus of praise, congratulating Buonarotti.

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Suddenly every one stopped. An ominous cry came through the open window —

“Buy to-day's list of the condemned.”

It was the voice of newsvendors calling out the result of the day's sitting at the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Incorruptible showed signs of uneasiness. Buonarotti had already begun the second verse —

“*Sur le pouvoir de tes appas  
Demeure toujours alarmée . . .*”

But a new cry was heard —

“Winning numbers! . . . Lottery of Sainte-Guillotine! Buy! Buy!”

“Shut that window!” Robespierre called out impatiently.

The boy Maurice ran to do so.

“Why!” he exclaimed, “here is Héron, and three people with him.”

At Héron's name Robespierre turned round sharply, and as every one seemed surprised at the untimely visit, he explained —

“Oh, it's all right! I expected him. He is bringing the young villain of yesterday's *fête*.”

“Ah yes,” said the women, “the *chouan* of the Place de la Concorde!” and they looked curiously towards the door, at which the new-comers were now knocking.

“Come in!” cried Duplay.

Héron entered and bowed to every one in the room.

“Is the culprit with you?” asked Robespierre nervously.

The police-agent replied in the affirmative, and was ordered to introduce the prisoner. Héron turned and signed to two men, who appeared escorting Olivier, pale and dejected, his hands tied behind his back. The young man, no longer resisting, seemed already to offer himself as a victim.

“He is a nice-looking fellow,” observed Madame Lebas, in a low voice.

Héron pushed Olivier forward, who, perfectly indifferent to his impending cross-examination, stood sullenly aside. Robespierre, always mistrustful, made a rapid survey of the young man from head to foot, keeping, however, at a safe distance from the fettered prisoner.

“What have you learnt about him?” he asked Héron.

The agent did not know much. The day before, while under arrest, the prisoner had let fall some words by which Héron understood that his mother, arrested with a young girl he loved, was threatened with the scaffold. But since his imprisonment he had been completely mute. No one had been able to draw a word from him, and things would have very likely remained thus had not Madame Beau-grand, a lodging-house keeper of the Rue du Rocher, come to the police-station for the purpose of obtaining some particulars of the arrest, the news of which had reached her. From the description of

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the young man she fancied he might be one of her lodgers, who had arrived the day before, and inscribed himself under the name of Germain, blacksmith's apprentice. Brought face to face with the prisoner, she exclaimed immediately, "Oh yes! it is he! most certainly!"

"And his papers!" asked Robespierre.

"He had none! Not even a passport! They had only found in his possession a set of keys, some paper-money in *assignats*, a pocket-book, and some small change in a purse." As he spoke, Héron placed these articles on the table.

"And no arms?" interposed Robespierre again.

The police-agent replied in the negative.

"Untie his hands. We shall see if they are a workman's."

Duplay examined them, the women watching with great interest the while. The carpenter declared it to be very possible, as the hands looked used to handling wood and iron.

"In war, most likely!" said Robespierre.

The Incorruptible then stated his suspicions more precisely. The man was perhaps a *chouan*, come in disguise from Vendée to stab him in the excitement of the *fête!*

The women cried out in horror at the thought, and added, "Of course he was not without accomplices!"

As this idea fastened in his mind, Robespierre wished to know if the young man's room had been

searched. Héron had not neglected to do so, as could well be imagined! He had, however, only found a few scattered clothes and a valise, which one of his men had with him. He had brought it to open before Robespierre.

“Why did n't you say so, then? Be quick and open it!”

Héron tried a set of keys, and after some delay the valise was unlocked.

The police-agent examined its contents, and enumerated them: linen, articles of toilet, and an ivory casket mounted in silver. He took out the ivory casket, which drew a cry of admiration from mother Duplay, and passed it from hand to hand. Héron then drew forth a rather heavy roll, from which he tore the paper wrapper, disclosing a number of *louis d'or*. He deposited them on the table, and set to work to count them, remarking that the young apprentice was, after all, richer than himself!

Meanwhile the agent continued his search.

“Ah, some letters!” he exclaimed.

“Give them to Lebas,” said Robespierre.

Lebas took the packet from the agent's hands.

“Go and examine them by the mantelpiece under the lamp,” Robespierre continued, “and tell me their contents.”

The curiosity of the women had now reached its height. Héron had drawn out a gold medallion, encircled with small pearls.



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"Those are real pearls," observed mother Duplay.

The medallion was opened, and found to contain a lock of fair hair, with the initials M. T. The jewel was handed round, admired, and examined carefully, giving rise to all sorts of reflections, in Olivier's presence, who looked on apparently unconcerned.

Robespierre was exasperated at this indifference. He knew, however, how to restrain himself, and said mockingly —

"You will not tell me, I suppose, that there is nothing extraordinary for a sum of money like that and such jewels to be found in the possession of an apprentice?"

Héron insinuated that perhaps he had stolen them, at which Olivier simply shrugged his shoulders. Duplay endorsed Héron's opinion. In fact, he had not the slightest doubt about it. The young man had stolen them.

Olivier could bear it no longer.

"Everything there belongs to me!" he said.

And as they seemed still to doubt, he repeated in a loud voice —

"Everything belongs to me! And, since you seem so anxious about it, know that I am an aristocrat, a royalist, and a *chouan*!"

The men cried out almost with one voice —

"At last! He owns it!"

Olivier took up the word at once.

"Very well! Since I have owned it, why don't

you get quit of me, and send me forthwith to the scaffold? I am weary of it all!"

But Robespierre calmly told him not to be in such a hurry, for he wished to know his name. As the young man defied him, saying he would have to ask elsewhere, for he should never learn it from him, Robespierre grew furious. He must have his name, and the names of his accomplices as well, for he was not single-handed; that was certain!

"And if I have no accomplice, you will find some, I'll be bound!" cried Olivier ironically. "But you shall not have my name!"

Lebas, having finished the letters, came forward, and Robespierre gave him a questioning glance. The letters, he said, revealed nothing in particular. They had been written two or three years ago, and bore no address or signatures of importance. Two signed Marie Thérèse were apparently from a young girl, the prisoner's sister or *fiancée*.

"Then the medallion belongs to her," put in Victoire; "M. T. are the initials on it."

But these letters revealed nothing, nor did three others signed "Your mother," couched in terms of endearment and advice. The style was most certainly that of an aristocrat. Only one letter—dated 1791—gave a slight indication, a very vague one.

Robespierre pricked up his ears—

"And the contents of that letter?" he asked.

Lebas scanned it once more. It was dated 1791,

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from a country place in one of the suburbs of Paris, and addressed to the young man, then a student, by his grandfather, who seemed also to be his godfather, for he says : " I shall expect you to-morrow evening, for my *fête* and yours, the Feast of St. Olivier."

" Is Olivier, then, his name ?" inquired Robespierre, looking at the young man.

But Lebas continued reading. " The valet, my dear child, will not fetch you this time. At fifteen a lad ought to be able to travel alone."

" The letter being dated May, 1791, the young man must be now nineteen," Lebas observed.

" Nineteen ! yes, just nineteen !" repeated Robespierre, as if a thought had struck him. " Go on ! Go on ? What comes next ?"

Lebas continued : " My travelling-coach will wait for you in the Rue des Lions, before the door of the hotel."

" There can be only one Rue des Lions in Paris, the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul ?" interposed Robespierre, more and more impressed, and still looking intently at the youth.

" Just so !" Lebas answered.

" Go on with the letter ! Go on !"

Lebas resumed his reading : " Benoît . . ."

" The concierge !" interrupted Robespierre, scarcely able to hide his emotion.

Lebas went on : " Benoît will open the shutters of the little room leading out of my study to the garden. In a bookcase, the one surmounted by the

busts of Cicero and Socrates, you will find just within your reach, and will bring to me, volumes x. and xi. of a set of folios bound in red morocco, with the title . . .”

“*Arrêts du Parlement!*” exclaimed Robespierre, to the general surprise, carried beyond himself by the revelation which had suddenly burst upon him.

Olivier looked at him, in bewilderment.

“That is it! *Arrêts du Parlement,*” repeated Lebas; “but how did you know?”

Robespierre, mastering his feelings, and without taking his eyes off Olivier, answered with assumed indifference —

“Oh! I have had those books in my hands many a time at Monsieur de Pontivy’s, King’s Councillor in Parliament, and that young man’s grandfather.”

Olivier turned deadly pale, and grasped convulsively at the back of a chair for support. His mother was lost! Exclamations of surprise and astonishment had greeted the Incorruptible’s words. Then Robespierre knew his family, and all about him? And all eyes were fixed on the young man with renewed curiosity.

“Yes . . . I know,” . . . answered Robespierre, forcing himself to appear calm, “I know . . . who he is . . .”

“Oh, now we shall hear the whole story!” they all exclaimed, clapping their hands.

“Certainly you shall,” Robespierre replied, “but in order to make sure I should like to be alone with

him. We are too many here ; I shall call you back presently. Let Héron and the police-agents wait in the courtyard."

Every one prepared to leave the room, looking rather disappointed, specially the women, who wondered what would be the outcome of it all.

As Lebas was passing out Robespierre stopped him.

"Don't go," he said, "I may want you."

And the three men remained alone.

The father was face to face with his son!

Robespierre's anger had all melted before this sudden revelation. He preserved, however, a stern countenance, subduing the almost uncontrollable emotion which threatened to overpower him. He was still struggling with it, trying to regain possession of himself, and, moved by a natural impulse, he told Olivier in a gentle voice to be seated.

The prisoner, however, did not heed him, and when Robespierre repeated his words even more persuasively, and in a trembling voice, Olivier still paid no attention. Seeing Lebas shrug his shoulders, intimating that Robespierre was really very good to insist, the Incorruptible explained — his eyes still fixed on Olivier — that it was but natural for him to show kindness towards the grandchild of a man whose secretary he had been for eighteen months.

The young man stared back in surprise.

"They never told you, then?" said Robespierre.

“Of course not. . . . They loathe my very name, your people, do they not?”

But he immediately added, to Lebas's astonishment, that this was no reason why he should forget his stay in Monsieur de Pontivy's house. He could not help thinking now of the happy evenings he had spent there and the many pleasant meals of which he had partaken, side by side with Olivier's mother. That dim, sweet spirit of the past, which the young man's presence had called from its grave, had softened his heart strangely towards him.

But Olivier interrupted him harshly. Robespierre might harden his heart again, then! His life was in Robespierre's hands! He could take it if it pleased him to do so. All the family had been victims to the Revolution: his grandfather who died of grief, his uncle killed in Vendée, his father mortally wounded defending the cause of the King. . . .

“But your mother? She is alive; you have not the right to sacrifice her life!”

Robespierre went on thus carefully, trying by well-placed insinuations and questions to wring the truth from him. If Olivier had cried “Down with the scaffold!” it was because he trembled for his mother's life? . . . because she was arrested?

“Am I not right in this?” he urged, with deep anxiety. “Is she not arrested?”

But he was met by a blunt denial.

And so the struggle between father and son went on; the former impatient to learn the woman's

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hiding-place, the latter firm and unshaken in his refusal to betray it to one whom he regarded as a tiger seeking his prey.

Robespierre, though wounded by every syllable, continued his soft persuasions. What! was it possible Olivier could not understand his wish to protect his mother, and to place her out of harm's reach, in memory of the time he had passed so happily at her side?

Olivier smiled in bitter irony. Robespierre need not waste his words. He well knew he had too much pride to allow any such remembrance to incline him to leniency. Ah, there were memories in that sweet past, as he called it, for which his mother would pay with her head! Friendship? *Robespierre's* friendship! Why, it paved the road to the scaffold! All his friends had trodden that deadly path.

A cry of indignation escaped Lebas, but Robespierre quieted him in a husky voice, himself a prey to the most feverish agitation. The lad's head had been turned by the *chouans*! He was not responsible for what he said! Then turning to Olivier he tried, with a ring of sadness in his voice, to persuade him that had he been a tyrant he would have punished his insolence, he would not have attempted to reason with him. But Olivier remained unmoved. This kindness was assumed, he told himself, to hide some dastardly plot! Robespierre only wanted to find his mother that he might avenge her

son's insult on herself. In vain the Incorruptible protested, deeply grieved and wounded. Olivier stoutly maintained his position, declaring that Robespierre was not a man to pardon any one who had publicly insulted him with such outspoken contempt and hatred.

“Wretch!” cried out Lebas.

But Robespierre signed to him to stop. Hatred? That word in the young man's mouth sounded like blasphemy. And trying to master himself, that his voice should not tremble, he asked him —

“Then you do hate me very much?”

Olivier again furiously asserted his abhorrence, and was met by the question —

“When have I ever wronged you?”

At this Olivier, losing self-control, nearly betrayed his secret.

“Wronged me! . . . When have you wronged me?” the young man repeated. “Was n't it through you that my mother was . . .”

But recollecting himself he stopped short.

“Arrested?” put in Robespierre.

“No!” exclaimed Olivier.

And then the struggle recommenced.

Robespierre was, however, quite sure now of the arrest. What he wanted to know was the name of the prison to which the two women had been taken, and he came near to the chair by which the prisoner was standing. Olivier instinctively recoiled a step. Robespierre, completely exhausted, made one last



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effort. He implored the young man to lay aside his mistrust and hatred, to help him to save those who were so dear to him.

"To help you to kill them, you mean!"

Robespierre started from his seat, exasperated beyond measure. This was going too far! Olivier must be mad! Could he not, would he not realise that the very way to kill the two unhappy women was to leave them for the executioner to do his work! Their turn would soon come.

"If yours does not come first!" interrupted Olivier.

What madness! Perhaps at this very moment they were entering the cart which was to take them to the Revolutionary Tribunal, and the next day to the scaffold. It was Olivier who was sending them to death, and all because he was too obstinate to say the word which would save them! He was a blind, unnatural son; he would kill his own mother!

Olivier, though amazed at Robespierre's persistence, remained unshaken.

"Are you so thirsty for her blood?" he cried, hurling at him this last insult.

At these words Robespierre lost all self-control.

"Fool!" he cried, "insensate fool!" as he paced the room in unrestrained excitement.

But Lebas had heard enough.

"Let us have done with this madman," he said, hurrying towards the door to call in the police-agents.

But Robespierre turned round —

“No! Not yet! . . .”

Lebas, pretending not to have heard, called out —

“Héron! Hér . . .”

Robespierre threw himself on him, and pinning him to the wall, said breathlessly —

“Don’t call, I tell you! Don’t call!”

Then lowering his voice he muttered in a dry whisper —

“Be quiet, man, I say! Be quiet! . . . It is my son!”

“Ah!” and Lebas looked at him in stupefied amazement.

When he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, he asked in a low voice —

“Why do you not tell him so?”

Could Robespierre tell him? Tell the lad who loathed him! Would he believe him? Olivier would say it was false, or how could he hate him so?

“Oh, no! I *cannot* tell him that I am his father!” he said sadly, sinking down exhausted on a chair.

Lebas took his hand and pressed it sympathetically, deeply touched.

“You are right!” he murmured.

And turning to Olivier he said aloud —

“Then let us discover the prisoners without him!”

Olivier understood that matters were becoming very serious. However, Robespierre looked dis-

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couraged. How was it possible to find the women, under their assumed names, in Vendée? But Lebas remarked that they might be in Paris. At this Olivier visibly trembled, which Lebas did not fail to notice.

“Why,” he continued — “why should he be so far from them?”

The point of this remark struck Robespierre.

“Yes, to be sure; you are right,” he said, and interpreting Lebas’s thoughts he bade him take a carriage and drive to each prison and interview every woman that had been arrested with a young girl. Lebas, who had already put on his hat, remarked that he did not think the night would suffice; there were so many women arrested with a daughter or a younger sister. And what if Olivier spoke the truth, and his mother had been inscribed on the prison-register under another name — her husband’s, for instance?

“Mauluçon,” interrupted Robespierre, the name suddenly recurring to him.

Lebas took out a note-book from his pocket. Was he a soldier, or a magistrate, this Mauluçon? Robespierre could not say. All he knew of him was that among the people represented as having gone into mourning for Louis XVI. he had seen the names of Pontivy, his son-in-law Mauluçon, and his daughter Clarisse.

“Clarisse!” repeated Lebas, stopping his note-taking.

Robespierre looked at him in surprise. In what way could that name interest him? Lebas had now closed his note-book, deep in thought. Clarisse? Olivier's mother was called Clarisse? But the woman who implored Robespierre's clemency for her son, aged nineteen, the woman whose letter he had refused to read just now . . .

"Was signed Clarisse?" cried Robespierre breathlessly.

"Yes," replied Lebas.

"That is his mother!" . . .

And pointing to the young man, who was on the brink of swooning.

"You see, it is she! Look at him; there is no mistaking, it is she!"

"She is at the prison of La Bourbe, then," said Lebas.

Robespierre could no longer hide his joy, at last he knew where to find them!

But he was interrupted by a cry of pain. Olivier, thinking his mother now irretrievably lost, had fainted away. Robespierre ran to him, and bending over tried to bring him to consciousness, gently reassuring him, swearing he was going to give the prisoners their liberty.

But Lebas, who was also bending over the young man, reminded the Incorruptible that Olivier no longer heard him. Then Robespierre, with infinite precautions, assisted by Lebas, lifted him into an armchair, and taking a bottle of scent left behind

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by the ladies, gently bathed Olivier's temples with the perfume. Lebas, rather anxious lest Robespierre's paternal solicitude should be discovered, remained on the watch, imploring him to be prudent.

"Some one might come in!" he urged.

Robespierre, entirely taken up with Olivier, shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them come!" he said impatiently. "I have a right surely to pardon my own son!"

Lebas recalled him to reality.

No! he had no right to pardon a *chouan*, who had insulted the Republic the day before in presence of the whole nation. Robespierre's enemies would seize the occasion to cite the example of Brutus sacrificing his son to the interest of his country. They would exact from him a like proof of patriotism. . . .

Robespierre was trying to loosen Olivier's cravat, but not succeeding asked Lebas's assistance. After all, he was right, especially as his enemies on the Committee of Public Safety, out of hatred for him, would kill the lad all the quicker. Opening the collar gently, he continued the while to reason about it, saying that the only means of saving him was to throw him brutally into prison, so as to mislead them, and to get him out secretly after three days.

The young man heaved a sigh.

"He is coming to," said Robespierre, checking his speculations.

Lebas observed that it was high time to let others come in; they would wonder at the length of the cross-examining. Robespierre assented, his eyes fixed on his son, who seemed now coming to himself. As the Incorruptible bent over him to ascertain if this was so, his lips touched the pale forehead.

But he heard steps, and had only time to pull himself up, when Héron entered, followed by his men.

Héron looked straight at Olivier, who had now recovered his senses.

“What! Did he faint?” he asked.

Robespierre had regained possession of himself, and at once assumed a brutal demeanour. Yes, the scoundrel had been playing a farce, and an infamous farce too! The family now entered also, brimming with curiosity and questions.

“Has the young man made a confession?”

“No; but he has betrayed himself, and I know all that I desired.”

General satisfaction was expressed. At last, then, he was caught, and his accomplices! At this moment Madame Lebas and Victoire discovered in what a sad state Olivier was. Had he been ill, then? They would have come to him; but Robespierre stopped them, assuming contempt.

“It was better,” he said, “to leave the young madman alone, for he really did not deserve that any one should take interest in him.”

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"Monster!" Olivier groaned.

Robespierre had heard the word. He took hold of Lebas's arm, as if for support, and pressed it convulsively. Then, in a voice which he tried to render harsh, he told him to conduct Olivier to the Prison de la Force. Héron had only waited for this; and his men seized their prisoner, who at the roughness of the police-agents gave a sharp cry.

"You brutes!" exclaimed Robespierre, in a faltering voice, taking a step towards his son in spite of himself. But Lebas stopped him.

"Be careful!" he whispered.

Robespierre sat down, realising his imprudence.

Lebas again whispered to him —

"Don't be uneasy, I will watch over him."

And telling the men not to handle the prisoner too roughly, he went out with them.

Robespierre watched his son disappear, and when he had gone he felt some one take his hand. This made him tremble. It was Cornélie.

How tired he seemed! Every one was around him now. That young madman had given him terrible trouble, hadn't he?

"Yes," he replied, wiping his temple, "it was very trying! Exceedingly trying!"

Duplay remarked that, judging from the length of the cross-examination, he must have learnt something very important. Robespierre made a gesture, as if protesting. Then rising abruptly he took

leave of the company, on the pretext of urgent work.

“The lad can rest assured,” said Duplay, “it is his death-warrant our friend has gone to sign.”

“What a pity!” observed Victoire; “the young fellow seemed so nice!”

But mother Duplay stopped her daughter indignantly, asking her if she was mad. What would the Incorruptible say if he could hear her?



## CHAPTER IX

### HOURS OF ANGUISH

ONCE in his room, Robespierre sank exhausted into a chair. At last he was alone! He could now give free vent to his long suppressed emotion. The feeling uppermost at the moment was one of dread dismay, as the terrible position rose before his mind, with all its fearful consequences. He gave no thought to the insult, it was the fate of the two women which haunted him. If he saved them it would atone for all in the eyes of his son. They had been arrested, thrown into prison, and cast for death, but he would set them free.

Who had arrested them? What had they done? Were they implicated in some seditious plot which would render it difficult to deliver them? As to Olivier's release, he would see to that. By causing things to drag a little, Olivier's trial could be put off until Robespierre had the power in his own hands, and could act as he liked towards his son. It was after all his concern, for it was he whom Olivier had insulted, and not the Republic, which he could not yet impersonate. Had he even been proclaimed dictator, and sole representative of France,

he would, he supposed, have had the right to pardon. It would seem but natural that his first act on accession to power should be an act of clemency! The most important thing then at present was that Olivier should remain in prison as long as possible under the closest supervision.

But again, why had the women been arrested? By whose orders? They were perhaps at that very moment at the Conciergerie, on their trial, before the Revolutionary Tribunal. He could, no doubt, secure their acquittal, but what if the inquiry brought Olivier's name to light?

"I am wandering!" he caught himself exclaiming. How, indeed, could the name of Olivier be mentioned during the trial? The young man had nothing to do with it. He had insulted Robespierre, it was to him personally he had to answer.

The Incorruptible rubbed his eyes, unable longer to follow the thread of his own thoughts. He was suddenly reminded of the law to be submitted by him next day to the Convention, the vindictive law which would ensure conviction without proof, evidence, or even cross-examination. This law would be of twofold service to him; it would rekindle the Terror, would help Robespierre to get rid of those who were still in his way, and be the means of reducing the two women to silence, thus saving not only Olivier's life, but theirs also. Olivier would then see that Robespierre was not the monster he imagined, for he would owe the lives of his

mother and of his *fiancée* to him, the very man he had so wantonly insulted!

Robespierre's reflections were suddenly interrupted by a knock. He started up. Some one was calling him. He listened, and recognising Lebas's voice, hastened to open the door.

"I saw a light through your window," said Lebas, "and knew you had not yet gone to bed."

"Well, what have you learnt?" Robespierre asked anxiously.

"They are still at the prison of La Bourbe."

"Both of them?"

"Yes, both of them."

"Ah!" sighed Robespierre, with relief.

"And I have given strict instructions in your name, that they were not to be allowed out, under any circumstances. I am quite satisfied on that point, since the Concierge knows that they have been arrested by your orders."

"By my orders?"

"Yes, alas!"

And he whispered to the Incorruptible, as if fearing to be heard —

"They are the two women from Montmorency."

"The women of the forest?"

"Yes!"

Robespierre leant back against his desk for support. Lebas pulled an armchair towards him, into which he sank quite overcome.

"You could not have prevented it!" said Lebas

gently; "nowadays surprises of that sort are common enough. How could you know?"

The Incorruptible gave no reply, but seemed lost in a dream.

"Take some rest now. . . . You must feel exhausted. . . . I feel so myself. . . . *Au revoir* till to-morrow. After all, why should you worry? Are we not the masters?"

"That is the question!" murmured Robespierre, without lifting his eyes.

But Lebas had just closed the door, and wished him good night.

Robespierre, left alone, resumed his train of thought. He had, himself, then, ordered the two women to be arrested. This made everything clear to his mind! He now understood why Olivier had insulted him, and matters were more complicated than he had imagined. But what was Clarisse doing at Montmorency? How had she gained acquaintance with that man Vaughan, who had proposed to him the Regency in the name of England? For one moment he was vain enough to think that Clarisse had acted in conjunction with the Englishman. She had perhaps an idea of winning Robespierre over to the Royalist cause, and of rendering homage to his exalted position and power, realising all the good he could do. If this were indeed the fact, then she knew everything, was aware of the Englishman's proposals, and of the forest interview! She was in possession of his

secret and could by a single word completely ruin him!

No! No! He was raving! . . . Why! he was accusing the mother of his child! For she was the mother of his son! Then he alone was in fault; . . . he who had her arrested for no reason! For no reason? Was that so certain? And he sought about in his mind for excuses. Yes! he was the dupe of Fate, the tool of blind Destiny! Why had Clarisse been there? Why had she been implicated with the secret interview? Why? Ah! why?

With closed eyes, still repeating that unanswered "Why?" he fell into a half sleep. Little by little the image of a cell in the prison of La Bourbe rose before him; Clarisse was there. She appeared to him, as he had seen her in her youth, at the Rue des Lions, with her sweet pale face, large blue eyes, fair silken hair, so fair . . . so fair. . . . He began to wonder that one so young and frail should have a son so big as Olivier! His dream-thoughts became more confused. . . . She was now Olivier's *fiancée*. . . . He was promising her to marry them in London, through the intervention of Vaughan . . . of Fox. . . . Fox was all powerful in England, as he, Robespierre, was in France. . . . His head gradually sunk on his shoulder, and he fell asleep at last.

The lamp, turned very low, shed upon him a flickering light, pale and subdued as the glow of a sanctuary lamp, softening as if in pity the stern lines of his troubled countenance, which even in sleep

did not relax the painful contraction of its features. He had fallen asleep, dressed as he was, his head aslant, his arms hanging by his sides listlessly. Now and then, his whole frame would twitch and quiver nervously, and vague, incoherent words escaped his lips at intervals; harsh, guttural sounds fell from him suddenly in that silent apartment, whose curtains and drapery in the subdued light assumed the soft and delicate tints of a young girl's chamber.

Its hangings were really of damask, with designs of white flowers on a blue ground, cut out of an old dress by Madame Duplay. This was the one obvious attempt at ornament. The Incorruptible's room was otherwise very modestly furnished, containing only the armchair in which he had fallen asleep, a few cane chairs, a very simple desk, a plain deal bookcase overladen with books and fastened to the wall, and a bed of walnut-wood.

The room was situated, as already said, in a wing which connected the main building occupied by the Duplay family with an outhouse opening on the Rue Saint-Honoré. It also communicated with little Maurice's room, to whom the Incorruptible in his leisure hours gave lessons in history, and on the duties of a citizen. The child, who had been sent early to bed on the arrival of the police-agents with Olivier, now slept soundly.

At about three o'clock, the boy awoke with a start. He heard a noise in the next room, and, thinking he recognised Robespierre's voice, turned

over to sleep again. It was not the first time his good friend had talked aloud in his sleep. But he was awakened again by the falling of a chair, and jumped from his bed anxiously and ran to open the door. In the flickering light of the nearly extinguished lamp he discerned the Incorruptible standing erect, still dressed, and gesticulating wildly as if pushing some one back. The boy advanced towards him, asking what was amiss. Robespierre stared at him with a frightened look, then folding him in his arms, he fell on his knees moaning. Between his groans the child could catch the words —

“My son! . . . My son!”

Then the lamp went quite out.

The child gently disengaged himself. *Bon ami* had called him his son! Yes, he was his son, his affectionate and dutiful son. Then with tender solicitude he helped him to rise. The day was already peeping through the half-closed shutters. Maurice with some difficulty succeeded in replacing his friend on the armchair in which he had passed the night, and asked him if he wished for anything. But Robespierre had fallen asleep again.

The boy returned to his room, walking backwards on tiptoe, fearing to awaken him, and went to bed again.

At seven o'clock in the morning Robespierre opened his eyes. He remembered nothing. The fact of having slept in his clothes, and in an armchair, did not surprise him. He had often done so in the

days of sore trial. He drew aside the curtains, and the room was suddenly flooded with daylight. Some one knocked. It was Maurice Duplay, asking if he could come in.

The boy's early visit surprised Robespierre.

"Are you well, *bon ami*?"

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing . . . only . . . last night . . . you know . . ."

"Last night? Well!"

"You rather frightened me!"

"Frightened you?"

"Yes, you frightened me!"

The child then told him what had taken place in the night.

"Are you quite sure?" asked Robespierre anxiously.

"Oh! quite sure, and since you called me your son it shows you recognised me, and had not the fever so badly after all."

"Yes, you are right! It was nothing since . . . as you said . . . since I recognised you; . . . for it was you of course I called my son: . . . you *are* my good little son, are you not?"

And he patted his cheeks, adding —

"But you must not speak of it to anybody! not to anybody, mind! It is not worth while worrying your father and mother."

"Oh no! I have never said anything!"

Robespierre began again to feel uneasy.



"How do you mean? You have *never* said anything?"

"Why, it is not the first time it has happened to you."

"Have you heard me before, then?"

"Oh yes! speaking loud in your sleep."

"And what did I say?"

"Oh, I never understood anything, . . . disconnected words, that's all. . . . And then I was so accustomed, I did not pay much attention. But last night it was too much and I got up."

"You should not have done so, it was nothing more serious than usual, only the worry and bother that upset me so."

"It was the cross-examination of the *Chouan* yesterday which unstrung you, I suppose?"

"Perhaps; . . . it may be. . . . But, you see, now I am quite well."

As the lad was going he called after him.

"Now you know, and you won't give it another thought, will you? And not a word, mind, not a word! Now go, child."

He was subject to such nightmares then?

"Perhaps I don't take enough exercise," he thought, and he resolved to go out at once into the open air. A good walk to the Champs-Élysées would completely revive him. He changed his clothes, shaved, powdered and perfumed himself as usual, and had actually started, but went back and took from a drawer in his desk the draft of the new

law which he had prepared the day before, and put it in his pocket. He had decided after reflection not to submit it himself, but to confide it to Couthon, one of the most faithful of his friends on the Committee with Lebas, Saint-Just, and Augustin. Couthon would read the document from the tribune, and this would leave him fresh and fit for the ensuing debate.

Having called at Couthon's house, and concluded this arrangement, Robespierre made his way to the Champs-Élysées through the Tuileries with his dog Blount, who gambolled joyously in his new-found freedom after a three days' confinement in the house. The Incorruptible walked quickly and briskly as usual, in spite of the intense heat, which was but little diminished by the shade of the chestnuts lining the avenue. He was already telling over in his mind those among his enemies who would be the first victims of the new law. As to Olivier and the two women, it was quite decided. They should remain in prison in the most absolute secrecy until the time came for him to be master.

At the end of the avenue he turned into the Allée de Veuves and went towards the Seine. Blount, who had scented the water, leapt and bounded forward in high glee. On fine summer days the dog used to swim in the river under the eyes of Robespierre. When he reached the banks of the Seine Blount was awaiting him, and at a sign jumped in the water, and the Incorruptible found

some release from his harrowing thoughts in watching the gambols of his dog in the river.

At the Convention the Bill read by Couthon was received with loud protests, and the subsequent debate opened amid turbulence and uproar. That the judgments of the Revolutionary Tribunal should be accelerated by the suppression of evidence and cross-examinations had already frightened not a few; but when it became a question of transmitting to the Committee of Public Safety the right of life or death, the whole assembly was filled with fear. Up to that time the Convention alone had the right to sit in judgment on a representative of the people!

A voice was heard exclaiming —

“ If that law is passed, nothing is left but to blow out our brains ! ”

Robespierre appeared in the tribune. The Bill was voted. The next day several attempts were made in the Convention to repeal the atrocious law which brought the Terror into their very midst, but all such efforts failed.

With so trenchant a law, a two-edged weapon which could be turned at will either against the Committee of Public Safety or against the Convention, according to the intricate windings of his subtle policy, with such a weapon Robespierre could keep his enemies of the Committee at bay. He had in future but to accuse them, and have them replaced by creatures of his own, satellites of his will.

However, all was going well. His adversaries, blind and unwary, had begun to tear each other to pieces in party disputes, and to split up into factions, the very day after the passing of the atrocious law which made him so dreaded.

The Incorruptible tried to take advantage of these cabals, but he was too hasty. The Committee, realising their danger, united against him; and this was the prelude to a terrible and decisive struggle, for in case of failure there remained nothing for Robespierre but to have recourse to force. Realising this to the full, he no longer attended the sittings of the Committee, but worked silently in the shade, preparing the *coup d'état* which was to rid him at once and for ever of all his enemies, — with Saint-Just, whom he had sent for from the Northern Army, with Hauriot, Commander-in-Chief of the armed force; Fleuriot-Lescot, Mayor of Paris; Payan, Agent of the Commune; and Dumas, President; and Coffinhal, Vice-President of the Revolutionary Tribunal. His design was very simple. He would denounce his adversaries of the Committee of Public Safety at the bar of the Convention and ask for their arrest and judgment. Should the Convention resist, he would subdue them with the help of Hauriot and his troops, and of all sections of the Commune, who on a sign from him and from Fleuriot, Payan, Dumas, Coffinhal, and their friends, would be stirred to insurrection, and would take the Tuileries by storm.

As to Olivier and the two women, they were always under his hand. Olivier, at La Force Prison, was in no way disturbed. Clarisse and Thérèse had been kept at La Bourbe by his orders. Twice the names of Olivier's mother and *fiancée* had appeared on the list of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and twice their names had been struck off by Robespierre, who, anxious and watchful, took care that all lists should be submitted to him.

Soon the decisive hour approached. It was the 7th Thermidor. Six weeks had elapsed since the memorable Fête of the Supreme Being, and the passing of the horrible Prairial law, which had sent hundreds of victims to the scaffold. The Terror was at its height, and France, prostrate before the knife of the guillotine, was awaiting in distracted anxiety the result of the struggle. The guillotine was also waiting, ready to devour whichever of the two parties was vanquished — Robespierre's opponents or Robespierre himself and his partisans.

The Incorruptible, driven to the last extremity, had fixed the battle for the next day, the 8th Thermidor, when he would throw off his mask and accuse his adversaries of the Committee of Public Safety in presence of the Convention. Although he was almost certain of the issue, he deemed it none the less prudent to take infinite precautions, and to put Olivier and the two women in perfect safety, in case of defeat, however impossible it might seem. They must be taken from prison, and all three

placed in some secure retreat, out of the reach of danger, from whence they could escape if necessary.

Robespierre thought of the Hotel de Ville, where he reigned supreme. Behind this, in the Rue du Martroy, were some unoccupied apartments, in a building connected with and forming part of the hotel. Clarisse might live there with her niece and Olivier until they could with safety leave Paris. He unfolded his projects to Lebas, who alone knew of the secret drama which poisoned the private life of the Incorruptible at the very moment when his public career was reaching its climax. Lebas approved the plan.

“I am entirely at your service!”

“Thanks. I was counting on your help. But don't let us be too hasty. To-morrow will be time enough. Everything depends on the sitting. If you see that the majority hesitate from the commencement, go immediately to La Bourbe and take the two women out, then to La Force and see about my son. The apartments are ready. You have only to take them there. But save the women first. Olivier must find his mother and his *fiancée* when he arrives.”

Then taking two papers from his pocket, he added, “Here are the warrants of release.”

“Agreed!” said Lebas, after reading them.

Next day at the Convention, Lebas, a parliamentary expert, judged that Robespierre would come out victorious from the contest, nor was he mistaken.

The Incorruptible had brought a general accusation, without mentioning names, against members of the Committee of Public Safety and General Security. This was received in anxious silence, a few only daring to protest. But the printing of the speech, and its circulation in all the communes of Paris, was none the less voted. It was an official accusation, by the voice of Robespierre, of his adversaries, before the whole of France. It was victory; and nothing was left but to name the victims.

But the implicated members of the Committee of Public Safety did not give him time. Vadier boldly made for the tribune, followed by Cambon, who, feeling it was a case of kill or cure, played a daring game, and replied to the general accusation of Robespierre by a direct, personal accusation, denouncing him openly to the astonished Assembly. The real traitor, he declared, was this masterful Robespierre, who paralysed the will of the National Convention!

There was a counter-wave of feeling among the members of the Assembly at this public indictment, and censure of their slavish submission to Robespierre. They seemed suddenly to realise their position, and the more daring members, seeing the tide turn, prepared for the fight. Thus the attacked were in their turn attacking.

Billaud-Varennes succeeded Cambon at the tribune.

“The mask must be torn aside, no matter whose face it covers!” he cried. “I would rather my

corpse should be the stepping-stone of the ambitions than by my silence be an accomplice of their crimes!"

Others succeeded Billaud-Varennes, reiterating his accusations more boldly and insultingly. Robespierre, disconcerted, tried to face the storm, but it was too late. In confining himself to a general accusation, in mentioning no names, he had frightened every one. The Assembly revoked their previous decision, and amended the Bill. The speech was not to be sent to the Communes, but to the Committee, to be examined.

"What!" cried Robespierre, "I have the courage to make before the Convention revelations which I believe necessary to the salvation of the country, and my speech is to be submitted for examination to the very men whom I accuse!"

Victory had been followed by defeat; a partial defeat, it was true, for, seeing the hesitating attitude of the Convention, Robespierre hoped to win them back again the next day. He must, however, be prepared for every emergency! That very evening he would take steps to organise an insurrection of the Communes, which, in case of resistance, would annihilate the whole set of dastardly cowards. The Incorruptible wished to act within legal bounds as long as possible, and only to overstep them when forced to do so.

Robespierre looked round for Lebas, but he had disappeared, and this gave him grounds for hope



that the two women, and perhaps Olivier, had reached the private apartments chosen by him in the Rue du Martroy. .

“I must go and make sure that all is well,” he said to himself; “there is not a moment to lose” —and leaving the Convention, he hastened in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TUMBRILS

AT that very moment Lebas reached the Hôtel de Ville with Clarisse and Thérèse. On leaving the prison of La Bourbe he had given a false address to the coachman who drove the prisoners, and he followed them at a distance in another carriage, accompanied by a man to superintend the luggage, who was one of the attendants at the Hôtel de Ville, and a devoted adherent of Robespierre. The second carriage soon overtook the first, when Lebas gave the correct address to the driver —

“ 13, Rue du Martroy ! ”

Clarisse and Thérèse mounted the stairs more dead than alive, ushered up respectfully by Lebas, and Urbain, the attendant, carrying their luggage. Where were they going? Who were these people? Lebas at the prison had scarcely spoken to Clarisse.

“ For your safety,” he had said simply, “ for your niece’s safety, do not question me before we arrive at our destination.”

For her safety? For Thérèse’s safety! Then they were to be saved? Who could save them? She would surely learn now who it was.

The two men stopped on the third floor, and Urbain opened a door.

"It is here!" said Lebas, making way for them to pass in.

The two women entered, and found themselves in a plain sitting-room with fittings and furniture of dark grey wood. Urbain took the luggage to a door opening on the left, through which a bedroom was visible.

"You must make yourself quite at home, here," said Lebas.

And he informed them that they were free, but from motives of prudence he who had saved them, and for whom Lebas was acting, had judged it advisable to offer them these apartments as a temporary residence, where they would be entirely out of danger's reach. Clarisse and Thérèse could not recover from their surprise, and wished to know to whom they owed their deliverance. But Lebas would not tell them, having received no orders to that effect. All he could say to reassure them was that their protector was all-powerful at the Paris Commune, and that the apartments were in direct communication, through a door which he indicated, with the Hôtel de Ville, so that they were under his immediate care.

Clarisse started. She understood now. She owed her safety to the Incorruptible! Her letter of the preceding month had reached Robespierre. She knew this already, as he had acknowledged it in a

few brief words three days after receiving it — “Fear nothing, your son is safe!” And this was all she had heard.

Lebas was still giving the women particulars of their new surroundings. Everything had been arranged to render them as comfortable as possible. The man who had accompanied them was entirely at their disposal, and it was to his interest to serve them well. His wife would see also to their wants, and take charge of their apartments, where they would be absolutely free and unrestrained.

Only one precaution was earnestly recommended to them; to show themselves as little as possible at the windows of their sitting or bed room, so as not to attract the attention of neighbours. They were especially told to avoid this in the afternoon, from four to six. The windows looked on to the Rue du Martroy, through which the carts carrying the condemned passed. The scaffold was now installed at the Barrière du Trône Renversé, and it was the shortest way.

The two women shuddered.

“Unhappily we had no choice,” Lebas added, seeing their repugnance, “but you will be warned by the cries of the crowd, and you can then retire to the dining-room which looks on to the courtyard. It lasts but a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, at the most.”

But Clarisse scarcely listened, her whole mind occupied with one thought, the longing to inform

Olivier, whose whereabouts she hoped soon to learn, of their release from prison.

“Could I write a few words to some one who is very dear to me?” she asked. “I wish to set his mind at rest about our welfare.”

Lebas replied in the affirmative, and she thanked him gratefully. He politely protested; she owed him no thanks, these were solely due to him whose orders he was executing. He then offered to take the letter himself, saying he would return for it in a quarter of an hour, as he had another urgent duty to fulfil. And he retired, leaving the two women with Urbain, who busied himself arranging the furniture of the sitting-room.

Thérèse, now full of hope, gave thanks to God. They would perhaps soon see Olivier again. What joy! But to whom did they owe their release? She looked inquiringly at her aunt. Clarisse owned that she believed it was to an ex-secretary of Thérèse’s grandfather, now all-powerful, and to whom she had written from the prison of La Bourbe. Thérèse seemed astonished that her aunt had not told her of this. But Clarisse made the very plausible excuse that she did not wish to raise her hopes, not knowing whether her appeal would have success.

The young girl was now looking through the shutters of one of the windows which Urbain had partly opened.

“Ah! there is a church!” she exclaimed, and immediately she thought that if they were allowed

to go out she would go and pray for their protector, for he could not be all-powerful and not have done wrong; he must belong also to the Government of Terror.

At the mention of a church, Clarisse approached the window. She recognised the building; it was St. Gervais Church, on whose portal could be read in large letters the sadly ironical inscription: "National Property, to be let as a Warehouse."

At Clarisse's request Urbain had placed an ink-stand and blotting-paper on the table, and Clarisse hearing it was ready turned round joyfully. "At last I can write to Olivier!" she thought.

She then seated herself at the table and began to write, while Thérèse was making a tour round the room, taking a survey of the furniture. Suddenly catching sight of an illustrated paper on a sofa, she took it up to pass the time away. It was five weeks old, and had been preserved no doubt on account of the illustrations. Its pages gave an elaborate account of the Fête of the Supreme Being of which she had heard Olivier speak, and against which he had so vehemently protested during his visit to the prison of La Bourbe. It had taken place, then?

She became interested and commenced reading to herself in a low voice: "*Description of the Procession. — Fireworks at the Fountain of the Tuileries. — Typical Groups. — Arrest of a Chouan. — Popular Indignation!*"

"I saw that myself," interrupted Urbain.

Thérèse turned to the servant, who was now dusting the mantelpiece, and asked him why the man had been arrested.

“Why? Because he cried: ‘Down with the scaffold!’”

The words struck Clarisse, who looked up from her writing. Only the day before the *fête* Olivier had reproached the French for not daring to throw that cry in the teeth of the Government of Terror. Thérèse, seeing her aunt look up from her writing, was struck with the same coincidence, and both, almost in the same breath, questioned the domestic, who said that, as far as he could remember, the young man appeared to be about twenty. He had been arrested at once to save him from the crowd, who would otherwise have torn him to pieces.

“His name? his name?” they both gasped.

That Urbain could not tell them. Clarisse rose, mastering her emotion, and with all a mother’s solicitude set herself to reassure Thérèse. Yes, they both had the same thought, had n’t they? She also was thinking of Olivier, but it could not be he. He would have written to them. Why, it was six weeks ago, and his visit to the prison would have been remembered! They would have been involved, but they had, on the contrary, been in no way made to feel it, and had been treated with every consideration.

“That is true,” answered Thérèse, glad enough to be convinced.

Clarisse took the paper gently from her hands, saying, "Instead of reading all this awful news, which inflames your imagination, go, dear, and arrange our room a little." And she added in half a reproachful tone: "You have not even looked at it, yet!"

Then gently pushing her into the room, she shut the door sharply behind her.

A terrible fear had taken possession of Clarisse. Why in his letter to her had Robespierre sedulously avoided mentioning Olivier's whereabouts? Turning to Urbain, she addressed him in a hoarse voice: "You say you saw this young fellow?"

The good man evinced surprise at her strange recurrence to the subject.

"I had the honour to tell you so just now, *citoyenne*."

Then Urbain would recollect him? What was he like? His face? The colour of his eyes? But that was too much to ask. He was in such a state, so broken down. How was he dressed?

Urbain could just remember. He described the costume: grey carmagnole and breeches, black and grey striped waistcoat.

It was Olivier's costume! There was no longer any possible doubt. It was he!

"It is he! It is he!" she kept repeating, falling at last into a chair, on the point of swooning.

At this moment the door opened and a man appeared, who without crossing the threshold signed to the servant, to whom he spoke in a whisper.



Urbain came towards Clarisse and delivered the message. "The *citoyen* Robespierre wishes to speak with you."

"Where is he? Oh! let him come! let him come!" she cried through her blinding tears.

The man left the room followed by Urbain. Clarisse waited in breathless suspense, her eyes fixed in mute agony on the half-opened door.

The Incorruptible came in, and before he had time to greet her, she had risen and was standing before him.

"My son? Where is my son?"

"Be assured, your son is safe."

She recoiled a step and fixed her eyes on him in amazed silence.

So it was true, the young man who had been arrested was Olivier!

Robespierre, greatly agitated, again essayed to reassure her, but she interrupted him eagerly. Where was he? In prison?

Robespierre lowered his eyes.

What! Had Olivier been sent to prison by him? Ah! things had come to a pretty pass. He was then the gaoler of his own son!

Robespierre made a gesture as if to protest. Then, mastering with difficulty his emotion, he explained everything. He had kept Olivier in prison as the only means of saving him. Had the lad been released he would have been reimprisoned by the Committee of Public Safety, who would have sent

him to the scaffold, if it were only to show Robespierre that he had no right to grant a pardon! But Olivier would be free now. Lebas was at that very moment at La Force prison, and would soon bring him secretly from thence to them. Olivier should remain with his mother and Thérèse until the day when they could all three leave without danger, and seek safety in the provinces.

Clarisse listened, now calm and reassured. But how had Robespierre known?

“Who he was? Oh, in the most unexpected manner, with the assistance of some letters found in his valise, for he absolutely refused to give me his name.”

Clarisse looked at Robespierre with a new fear in her eyes. Then he had seen him? Olivier knew the terrible secret of his birth?

“Oh, no!” replied the Incorruptible sadly, “don’t be uneasy about that. I have not said a word to lessen his love and trust in you, or disarm the bitter hatred he has for me, which avenges you too well . . .”

But Clarisse interrupted him. Robespierre was mistaking her feelings. She did not ask to be avenged, she did not even think any more of reproaching him with the past which divided them. It was all so far, so far away, that past!

The Incorruptible looked at her with eyes full of sadness and regret. Yes, there she stood, in her faded prison dress, her face lined before its time, a

living reproach, a poor pale ghost of bygone days. Those blanched lips, with their melancholy droop, the token of long suffering and resignation, those lips had received his first kiss!

Clarisse would think no more of the past! He thought of it though, thought of it there, looking at her. Had he been so culpable, after all? Why had Monsieur de Pontivy filled his heart with hate and rancour by refusing him her hand and turning him out like a lackey? On account of a difference of caste? Well, from this prejudice had sprung the Revolution which had levelled all under the knife of the guillotine! That sad past, the terrible present, were both due to the pride of Clarisse's father. For he would not have thrown himself madly into the turmoil. . . .

But Clarisse again interrupted him. The past was dead now, quite dead!

"No," he cried, "the past is not dead, since your son is here, the living proof of what has been . . ."

Clarisse shook her head.

"The punishment is mine, for if his hatred has been a blow to your pride, causing you some transient pain, it is I who must live out my life beside that hatred. Each time my son pronounces your name with loathing and indignation, I can only ask myself in terrified agony, if he will ever pardon me for having given him a father such as you!"

Robespierre, thoroughly disheartened, looked at

her sadly. "You also!" he exclaimed. What! did Clarisse share the general error? Did not she penetrate through the apparent violence of his policy to the sublime end he had in view? He sought to explain his views to her, his notions for ensuring the universal happiness of mankind; he depicted the sacred ideal he dreamt of reaching by purging France of all base and evil-minded traitors who defiled her. He an assassin! He a tyrant! No! he was an avenger, an apostle of justice and virtue! He was not responsible for the excesses of a nation who had been enslaved for centuries, and had suddenly cast off their chains. Every conquest was of necessity accompanied by carnage, every revolution left the stains of blood behind!

Clarisse contemplated him with the same astonishment Vaughan had experienced in the forest of Montmorency, when Robespierre had unfolded to the Englishman his projects and visions of universal happiness, which could only be realised by the help of the guillotine.

"The future will justify me!" he continued. "When I am in power my deeds will convince you."

"But are you not all-powerful now?" Clarisse exclaimed in spite of herself.

He showed her she was mistaken. No, he was not supreme! Not yet! Enemies barred his way; but they were the last, and he was about to overthrow them in one decisive contest! Yes, he

yearned for that moment to come, for his strength would not hold out much longer.

Then, lowering his voice, and trembling lest he should be heard, he told her of the wretched life he led; hunted down on all sides, hated, betrayed, his every movement watched, a dagger ever hanging over his head. He spoke of his sleepless nights! Oh! how he would hasten that last battle! To make the victory sure it would be as terrible as possible; the whole horde of wretches who had caused him such unspeakable torture should be swept from his path! Peace! Peace! how glad he should be to welcome it with open arms . . .

Clarisse listened in amazement to this wild tirade. He had spoken of his haunted life, his sleepless nights. But were not these ever the lot of tyrants? He sought forgetfulness, peace, a renewal of some of the joys of life? Then why did he not stay the infamous proceedings of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and throw wide the prison doors? From every breast would then resound a cry of deliverance which would atone for all! What greater happiness for him, after causing so many tears than to dry them again! "Impossible! impossible!" answered Robespierre. Not yet! He would have to pay for it with his life like Danton! The hour had not yet come! Clemency was treason, mercy meant death. In order to survive it was necessary to denounce, accuse, strike, and slay remorselessly. For it was the fear of death which prompted the

French to their most inhuman acts. It influenced every one, from the Convention, the Committees, the Revolutionary Tribunal, to the very crowd who had become the abject slaves of that terror which held France in absolute subjection. They had well called this Government "the Terror." Oh, yes! it was a terror for the victims, for the accusers, for the judges, a terror for all!

Clarisse looked at him, in bewilderment. There was no more hope, then? France was to perish under that rule of abject cowardice? Would no one take this evil by the throat and strangle it?

"Yes," replied Robespierre.

"But who, my God! who?"

"I!"

"You?"

"Yes, I myself!"

And Robespierre unfolded his plans. When once the Committee of Public Safety had perished on the scaffold he would be master, a master strong enough perhaps to do away with the executioner and to decree clemency! When would that day come? He could not tell yet! Perhaps in a few days! For the moment it was the vigil of arms. Nothing was now possible but patience?

Clarisse was listening to a far-off sound which reached them like the muffled roar of distant waves. What was that noise?

Robespierre had heard it also and started up pale and nervous.

It was the crowd greeting fresh cartloads of condemned, which were passing the Place de la Grève.

Clarisse groaned; she understood! The death on the scaffold, the last ride of those condemned by the Revolutionary Tribunal! Lebas had warned her; it was just the time! The tumbrils would pass there, in that street, under these very windows! Robespierre hastened to close the shutters.

Clarisse, completely unnerved, gave way to grief and despair. So, all those people were doomed to die, because the hour of mercy had not yet come! In a few days, Robespierre had said it himself, in a few days they might be saved! The unfortunate victims must die on the very eve of deliverance! Oh, it was horrible! horrible! horrible!

“What can be done? I am powerless,” repeated the Incorruptible.

What! he could do nothing? Could he not now, at this moment, do what he thought to do in three days' time? Could he not call out from the window to the mob, the long-yearned-for-cry, “Mercy! oh, have mercy!” He had but to call these words out to the crowd whose idol he was, and it would be an atonement for all his life. “Mercy!” and he was a hero, a savior! “Mercy!” and his son would no longer have the right to hate him, and to curse his name!

Robespierre was grieved and distressed beyond measure. Clarisse did not know what she was saying! How could he stop the tumbrils, arrest

that crowd, composed of the very scum of the nation? Why, there was not one self-respecting man among them! Nothing but a mob mad with the lust of blood. The only power they feared or respected was the Terror—the Scaffold! He, Robespierre, their idol? Nay, he was not! Their idol was the executioner! To fight single-handed against such a besotted, blinded rabble would be madness, sheer madness!

Clarisse paid no heed, but continued supplicating him with uplifted hands, deaf to all argument.

The tumult of the mob, which sounded nearer, causing the very sashes to shake, announced the approach of the tumbrils. Robespierre, drawn in spite of himself to the window, partly opened the shutters to look out, followed by Clarisse who stopped as the hubbub of the crowd grew suddenly louder, and uttered a stifled cry —

“Here they are!”

Robespierre closed the shutters again. Tears started to Clarisse’s eyes. She appealed to the kindly qualities of his youth. She had known him ever compassionate and generous. He had but to call to mind how he had revolted against injustice, how solicitous he had ever been for the weak and oppressed. Think of that time! Think of it! and all the spirit of her youth rose to her lips in that cry of pity for the innocent victims of misrule. Yes, innocent! They were innocent! And he refused to save them!



“Once more I tell you it is madness,” Robespierre groaned in despair. Would she not understand, it was his death she was crying out for, her own death too, and the death of her niece? He had only to attempt to save those unhappy victims, and the crowd would at once turn upon him with the fury of wild beasts! He would be accused of treason by the *sans-culottes*, and the fishwives dancing yonder under the windows and howling the *Carmagnole*! He would be cut to pieces by the swords of the prison escort, crushed under the cart-wheels, and cast into the gutter by the rabble for having dared to arrest the reign of Terror! Was that what Clarisse wanted? Or would she perhaps allow him to live still to be able to save her, to save her niece and her son?

The entrance door was pushed open. Robespierre turned, and seeing Urbain understood that Lebas had at last arrived with Olivier. He did not, however, wish to be seen by his son.

“Let Citoyen Lebas and his companion wait outside till I have gone,” he said.

Urbain looked astonished.

“But there is no one with Citoyen Lebas,” he replied.

Clarisse started up.

“What! no one?” asked Robespierre.

“And Olivier?” Clarisse said in a low voice, trembling with suspense.

Robespierre moved towards the door and called

anxiously to Lebas. The day was fast closing, the setting sun, peering in through the half-open shutters, shed a crimson light in the apartment, staining here and there in patches and streaks the furniture and curtains with the hue of blood.

Lebas came in alone.

Olivier was no longer at the prison of La Force!

"Escaped?" asked Robespierre breathlessly.

"Unfortunately not!" said Lebas, "but taken by Coulongeon, the police-agent, by order of the Committee of Public Safety, to . . . Where? No one could tell! To the Conciergerie perhaps?"

"Before the Tribunal!" Clarisse almost screamed.

Robespierre was stunned. The wretched members of the Committee had placed Olivier on trial! He had been, perhaps, condemned, and might even now be on the road to the scaffold, in one of those approaching tumbrils. He cried breathlessly to Lebas—

"Oh, quick! Go down and see!"

Lebas rushed off, and Robespierre ran to the window, Clarisse in mad despair following him.

"If he is . . . you will, you must, cry out to the people that he is your son!"

Alas! Could he? The populace would answer that his son was a *Chouan*! that he might thank the Tribunal for freeing him from such disgrace.

Thérèse, drawn from the bedroom by the deafen-

ing cries of the crowd, now entered, trembling with fear. The carts were there . . . She could hear them!

“Mamma! mamma! do you hear?”

She stopped at sight of Robespierre.

“The friend who saved us,” said Clarisse, answering her look of surprise.

Thérèse went straight to the window, but Clarisse barred the way.

“Oh, no! she must not look at such a spectacle. Better kneel down and pray. . . . Pray for those about to die and for them also, yes for themselves, with all her soul!”

Thérèse fell on her knees and joined her hands, her large blue eyes, brimful of tears, lifted towards Saint Gervais, the deserted church, where the lingering spirit of outraged religion might perhaps accomplish a miracle!

The terrible tumult now burst on their ears like the rumble of thunder. As it drew nearer, separate sounds were distinguishable; screams, ribald laughter, hooting, degrading clamour, and coarse jokes reached them; all the hatred and fury of the Parisian populace was manifest in those hideous revels. The crowd was ushering the first tumbril into the Rue du Martroy, preceded by the mænads of the guillotine, loathsome, drinkbesotted viragoes, who yelled, and contorted themselves, dancing the *Carmagnole* in front of the condemned. Discordant strains of revolutionary songs rose above the rum-

bling of the cart-wheels, the clank of horses' hoofs, and the cracking of whips.

Robespierre had half opened the shutters, and tried to distinguish the first cart through the dense crowd. Clarisse struggled with him to look also, but the Incorruptible held her back resolutely.

“No; I will look alone!”

“Do you see him? Tell me; is he there?”

“No,” he replied, still preventing her from approaching.

Then, as Robespierre made an eager movement, she gasped in her agony —

“He is there; I know it!” and again she struggled to reach the window.

“I swear to you he is not there!” and exhausted he quitted hold of her to wipe his brow.

The first tumbril had passed. The songs and cries of the mob surrounding it were lost in distance, and these muffled sounds were mingled with the murmurs of the crowd awaiting the other tumbrils. Olivier was not in the first. But the second? He was perhaps in the second?

Clarisse would have cried out in her despair, but she struggled against the mad impulse and suppressed her choking sobs lest she should reveal the awful truth to Thérèse, who, still on her knees, her eyes turned to the desecrated church, prayed aloud:

“*Our Father Which art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done. . .*”

But she was interrupted by another outburst from

the mob announcing the second tumbril. Already scraps of the furies' songs reached her from the distance :

*“ Dansons la Carmagnole !  
Vive le son  
Vive le son  
Dansons la Carmagnole  
Vive le son  
Du canon ! . . . ”*

Clarisse, taking advantage in a moment of Robespierre's relaxed vigilance, pressed nearer to the windows.

“The second cartload !”

“There are two of them,” said Robespierre, who, taller than she, could command a more distant view.

Two! two carts! It was impossible for Olivier not to be in one of them. Clarisse felt it! He must be there!

“He is there, I feel it. . . . I tell you he is there !”

In her anxiety to see better she grew regardless of precaution. Robespierre struggled to draw her from the window. It was madness. She might be seen!

Thérèse still raised her voice, choked with tears, in supplications to heaven :

*“ Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen ! ”*

A cry of anguish rent the air. Clarisse had recognised Olivier! “There in that cart!” Robes-

pierre strained his eyes, half dead with fear. . . .  
“Where? Where?” He could not see him!  
“Oh yes! Yes! there, in the second cart! That young man standing, his head bent! . . .” And unable longer to contain herself, in the madness of grief, she placed her hand on the window clasp and would have opened it; but Robespierre prevented her, and the struggle began again. No! she was mistaken! She need only look! The young man was raising his head.

“There, you see, it is not he!”

“Then he must be in another cart! . . .” And worn out with agonising suspense and excitement she sank down in a chair. Again the noisy clamour died into the distance.

Robespierre took courage now. It was surely the last cartload!

“You look!” cried Clarisse. . . . “I cannot look again!”

Oh! if it were the last! If it were the last and their torture at an end!

She leant her head on her hands and closed her eyes in order to see no more, while great silent tears trickled through her fingers.

Robespierre lifted the shutters and stopped to look through, but quickly let them fall again. Alas! It was not over! There was still another tumbril. The buzz of sounds advancing gradually betokened it too well!

In one bound Clarisse was at the window.

“Will it never end!”

Robespierre made a gesture to close her mouth.

“For God’s sake, do not scream!”

But Clarisse did not heed him; she would go out! Out, into the street! It was too awful! She would put an end to it all! Robespierre held her back with fresh entreaties. Maddened by the restraint, she struggled desperately to free herself.

Thérèse, distracted from her orisons by the violence of the scene, turned her head. Seeing Clarisse’s state, she understood all in a moment. Olivier was there in one of those tumbrils! Olivier was on the way to the scaffold! . . . And Clarisse, now regardless of consequences, owned the truth.

“Oh yes, Olivier, our Olivier, he is there! They are going to kill him! . . .”

“Olivier! kill him!” repeated Thérèse, half dazed; then the awful reality rushed suddenly upon her. She started to her feet with a cry that echoed through the house.

“Olivier going to die? Oh! mamma, mamma!”

Robespierre continued his supplications, holding Clarisse, who still struggled, in his grasp. She would have her son! She would go and demand him from the executioner! Every mother there would intercede for her!

“If they will not give him to me, let them kill me, kill me with him! I will go! I will go! I must save my son! For God’s sake, let me go!”

Robespierre implored Thérèse to help him hold

Clarisse back. The young girl, realising the madness of the act, appealed also to her aunt, speaking words of consolation and of hope.

But her voice was drowned in the roar of the mob, that rose and beat against the window-panes like the waves of an angry sea.

“*Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!*”

howled the Mænads, flinging their fearful watchword on the wind, heralding the dreadful spectacle of advancing doom, dancing a veritable dance of death.

“*Ah! Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,  
Les aristocrats à la lanterne;  
Ah! Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,  
Les aristocrats on les pendra.*”

Clarisse had now freed herself, and ran to the door to open it. But Robespierre, quick as thought, stood before her and barred the way.

“Remain where you are, I charge you!”

Then resolutely and solemnly he added —

“I myself will go! And if he is in that cart, I will brave all to save him!” Seeing that Clarisse seemed doubtful, he added with emphasis — “I swear it to you!”

A flood of tears, tears of gratitude, was Clarisse’s only answer.

“May you be forgiven all for those brave words!” she sobbed.

He led her to a chair near the window, and in a



state of exhaustion she allowed herself to be seated. Thérèse bending over her forgot her own tears, in drying those of Clarisse. Robespierre, drawn to the window by a fresh outburst in the street, turned and looked out. There was but one more cart now! The prison escort followed in the rear. It was indeed the last!

The last! It was the last cartload! If Olivier was not there, he was saved! But he must be! Alas, he must; where else could he be? Struggling between hope and fear, Clarisse fell on her knees, and with clasped hands prayed aloud.

“O Lord, my God! my God! God of mercy and compassion, grant that my child may not be there!”

Thérèse had also fallen on her knees beside Clarisse, so that the two now knelt, locked in each other's arms, and prayers and supplications rose from both their lips.

“*Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!*”

howled the mob.

“Lord, my God, have pity on us!” repeated the women.

Robespierre, livid to the lips, continued his agonising watch.

Growing anxious at the silence of the Incorruptible, Clarisse would have risen, but her strength failed her, and she sank down again on her knees, her eyes fixed on Olivier's father, trying to read in

his drawn features evidence of his hopes or fears. Thérèse joined her in this mute questioning.

Robespierre was alternately raising himself, bending aside, or stooping lower to see more plainly.

Suddenly he gave an exultant cry —

“He is not there!”

“Are you sure? Are you sure?” gasped Clarisse, trying to rise.

Thérèse, more easily convinced, kissed the poor mother in a burst of joy.

“Are you sure? Are you sure, though?” repeated Clarisse in a fainting voice.

Robespierre to convince her came and raised her, and supporting her in his arms, carried her to the window.

“Do you believe me now?” he said.

It was true. There were only women in the cart.

“Only women! My God, what a relief!” exclaimed Clarisse leaving the window.

But she suddenly realised that her mother’s heart had made her selfish and inhuman, and with joined hands she implored pardon of those unfortunate victims. She had fallen on her knees again, her head on the back of a chair, thoroughly prostrate with exhaustion.

Robespierre was now preoccupied with thoughts of Olivier. He was not in the tumbrils! Where was he, then?

Confiding Clarisse to the young girl’s care, he took his hat to go.

“Whoever you are, sir, may God bless you!” said Thérèse with a long look of gratitude.

Robespierre turned and looked earnestly at her. He tried to speak, but his voice failed him. Feeling his eyes fill with tears, he hurried from the room.

Vague, far-away murmurs came to them from the distance, then ceased entirely, while the belfry clock of Saint Gervais struck six.

## CHAPTER XI

“ALL THESE GLIDING GHOSTS”

ON the stairs Robespierre met Urbain who was just coming up.

“Quick! fetch me a hackney-coach!” he called.

The man turned and hurried down the stairs two steps at a time. A fiacre was crossing the street, crawling as if waiting for a fare, and the driver cynically inquired if he should take him to the scaffold.

“Place du Trône Renversé, *citoyen*? The fun has n't commenced yet!”

Urbain opened the door while Robespierre gave the address: “To the Committee of Public Safety! and make haste!”

He then threw himself back in the carriage, which turned round, and rolled rapidly in the direction of the Tuileries. The Incorruptible would soon have the key to the mystery! The police-agent of the Committee, Coulongeau, could tell him at once where to find Olivier. He would wring the secret from him by force if necessary!

When he arrived at the Tuileries, Robespierre looked vainly for the police-agent; he wandered from room to room, questioning every one he met, putting the whole official staff at their wits' end, but no Coulongeau was to be found.

The absence of the police-agent confirmed Robespierre's suspicions. Olivier must then be at the Conciergerie under guard.

“Oh! I can be there in time!” he thought, and leaving the Tuileries, he went home to supper at the Duplays.

It was now seven. The family, who had waited supper for Robespierre and Lebas, were growing anxious, as they knew that the sitting of the Convention had been long finished. Duplay, who had just returned from the Revolutionary Tribunal, took an optimistic view of things. The sitting had been certainly a failure for Robespierre, but he was not a man to be trifled with! He would promptly retaliate, and assuredly the meeting at the Jacobin Club that evening would turn the tables upon his foes. The women with one consent decided to attend, feeling it was but right to show their sympathy, though Duplay raised a few feeble objections, mainly as a matter of form.

“But since you are so sure we shall be victorious,” urged little Maurice ingenuously, “what do we risk?”

Robespierre appeared at that moment, his face drawn and haggard. He tried, however, to smile as if nothing were amiss before the family, and said, in answer to inquiries for Lebas, “He will soon be here; I saw him less than an hour ago.”

“Where?”

“At the Hôtel de Ville.”

They understood, of course. Robespierre and Lebas had been to assure themselves that the forces of the Commune were in readiness in case some fresh phase of affairs might force the Incorruptible to break the bounds of the law; and when they proposed to go with him to the Jacobin Club after supper he seemed touched, and, feeling sure of success, was not unwilling that his intimate friends should witness his triumph.

The front door opened. It was Lebas returning, completely out of breath, from the Place du Trône. After having assured himself that Olivier was not in the tumbrils, he had gone, to be quite certain, to the very foot of the scaffold. The Incorruptible met him with questioning looks.

“You can be at rest! He is safe for to-day . . .”

“Yes, I know,” said Robespierre, “but have you found out where he is?”

“No,” answered Lebas.

“He can only be at the Conciergerie, then. I will go there this evening after the meeting at the Jacobins.”

Supper was soon over. Robespierre wished to be at the Jacobins at eight o'clock, at the very beginning of the sitting, for fear of being taken unawares by the Committee, who were capable of anything.

“I am sure my worst enemies will be there,” he muttered to Duplay, who assured him to the con-

trary, as the family started along the Rue Sainte-Honoré in anxious groups. The Incorruptible walked ahead, at some distance from them; Cornélie noticed in astonishment that he did not offer her his arm as usual, and said so to Lebas, who, forcing a smile, answered, “He is so preoccupied just now!”

Cornélie tossed her head. It was not the first time she had accompanied him to the Jacobin Club in times of anxiety, and on those days he was most attentive, and seemed to feel in special need of sympathy. Lebas did not reply, thinking of Clarisse and Olivier, whilst Cornélie continued her threnody of woes. Robespierre was a few paces in front of her, walking alone, and did not even turn to bestow on her a single glance.

“Something is amiss,” she said. “I never saw him thus before.”

He was in fact thinking of Clarisse, of her joy a few hours hence to have her son again, for Robespierre would take Olivier from the Conciergerie directly he was sure of his triumph at the Jacobins; he thought also of this triumph, now so certain, which would seem all the greater if Clarisse could witness it. She would see then how highly he was esteemed, admired, and loved by all true, honest Republicans, by all staunch soldiers of justice and humanity. Suddenly he stopped at the door of the Jacobins, and went in without even turning to see if any one was following.

This building, once the property of the monks of St. James, had recently been turned by the Revolutionists into a political club. A powerful party reigned there, exercising an occult influence on the direction of public affairs and on the rulings of the Convention, whom they terrorised by their democratic arrogance and their violent, obstinate fanaticism.

The meetings were held in a part of the building formerly known as the convent-church, opening on to a long gallery hung with portraits of monks, which led to the ancient library. At the lower end of this assembly-room an altar was still standing, stripped of all its ornaments and symbols of sacred services, now forgotten in the hall where fierce fanatics, breathing slaughter, hounded to death the victims of the guillotine.

When empty, with its amphitheatre, its presidential stand, its tribune, the room had the aspect of an ordinary debating hall. When full, it was a tribunal of inquisition, the headquarters of terror and of fear.

Robespierre had become the ruling spirit of the Club. He was their lord-paramount, whose word was absolute, and he was greeted on his appearance by a thunder of applause. The hall was filled with an enthusiastic crowd, exasperated at the partial defeat of their idol at the Tuileries. Robespierre, deeply touched, returned their salutations gratefully, and re-read his speech prepared for the Convention,



interrupted at every point by loud approval. In order to stir their minds to the necessary pitch of excitement, he spoke of this as his last testament, and so induced another outburst of extravagant sympathy.

“ I will die with you, Robespierre ! ” called out one deputy.

“ Your enemies are the enemies of the whole nation ! ” cried another. “ Say the word, and they shall no longer exist ! ”

Robespierre looked at them with eyes full of gratitude. He was hoping that some one would commence an attack, that he might retaliate there and then, and so accentuate his triumph. He had perceived among the crowd his adversaries, Billaud-Varenes and Collot d’Herbois. They tried to speak, and were hissed ; they persisted, and were greeted with cries of “ To death with them ! ” Daggers even were drawn, and they had scarcely time to escape.

The name of Robespierre was in every mouth in that vast hall, acclaimed with cries of wild approval that re-echoed to the very Tuileries.

The Duplay family, as may be imagined, beside themselves with joy, waited for Robespierre outside, but he was nowhere to be seen. It was in vain they inquired of every likely passer-by. He had completely disappeared.

Leaving the Assembly-room among the first he had slipped out under cover of night, taking a short cut to the Tuileries, whose dark mass aided his

further flight. For he was flying from his glorification, escaping from his rabid admirers, who would have borne him in triumph through the streets of sleeping Paris, making them ring with thunderous shouts of triumph. Creeping along the side of the walls, his face muffled in his collar, he hastened his steps to the Conciergerie, and as he walked his thoughts reverted to the subject of his reception. The Jacobins' enthusiasm must have resounded to the chamber of the Committee of Public Safety, and fallen like a thunderbolt among the traitors in the very midst of their dark plots! The effect must have been terrible! He already pictured the Convention appealing to him with servile supplication, delivering the Committee into his hands, and asking the names of his enemies, that they might pass sentence on them all. He smiled triumphantly as he crossed the Pont-Neuf, without casting a glance at the splendid spectacle which lay at his feet on either side of the bridge; for it was July, and all the glory of a summer sky studded with stars was mirrored in the stream.

He walked on quickly, wrapt in his own thoughts. Ah! not only did they wish to ruin him, but they would have sent Olivier to his death! He had forestalled them, however. The very next day they should take his son's vacant place in that same Conciergerie, the antechamber of the guillotine!

Robespierre had reached the quay, and was now at the foot of the Silver Tower, whose pointed spire

stood out in the moonlight like a gigantic finger raised to heaven. It was in that tower that Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal — death's henchman — lived. Robespierre scanned the windows. All lights were out. Fouquier slept, then? What brute insensibility! But he would sleep also, he told himself. Ah, yes! the terrors of the scaffold would soon be over! No more butchery, no more guillotine! He had promised it to the mother of his son, and he would keep his word . . . he would, within three days.

Reaching the side entrance of the Conciergerie, he gave three knocks, and a grating was opened in the door.

“It is I— Citoyen Robespierre.”

The gate swung back on its hinges, and a voice was heard exclaiming —

“*Salut et fraternité, citoyen!*”

It was Collas, the turnkey, on duty.

“I want Citoyen Fouquier-Tinville.”

“He has not returned, *citoyen.*”

Robespierre betrayed impatience.

“Can I do anything for you, *citoyen?*” said Collas.

“I wish to know if you have among your prisoners a certain Germain, lately at La Force prison.”

“Well, we can see that on the prison register, *citoyen.* Nothing will be easier, if the registrar is still here. Let me ascertain through the watchman.

Would you care to follow me? Just wait a moment; I have not the keys."

Collas went back into his lodge, and returned with a bunch of keys. Then, taking down a lantern from the wall, he commenced threading the mazy alleys of the Conciergerie, followed by the Incorruptible. It was the first time Robespierre had entered this prison in which so many of his victims had been immured. The two men turned into the old banqueting hall of the Kings of France, a long gallery with a vaulted ceiling of oval arches supported on massive pillars; keeping to the left, they came upon an iron trellised gate, which the turnkey opened. Robespierre found himself in a railed enclosure, a kind of antechamber leading to another vaulted gallery, which in the dim light seemed of indefinite length. Two towering gates on the left opened into a court on which the moon shone, lighting up vividly a pile of buildings surrounded with grey arcades.

As Robespierre and the turnkey advanced they came upon a man sleeping in a chair, with a lantern at his feet. It was the night watchman.

"Hallo, Barassin!" called the turnkey, shaking his bunch of keys in his ears.

The man woke with a start. At the mention of Robespierre he rose in a tremor of fear at being caught slumbering on duty. He excused himself profusely — he had been so hard-worked this last month; there was no sleeping at all with the cart-

loads of prisoners coming at every moment. Then, with officious zeal, he invited Robespierre to remain with him while Collas went to ascertain if the registrar was still there, though this was very unlikely at that late hour. The turnkey went on his errand.

“What part of the prison is this?” asked Robespierre, looking around.

“We are between the two gates, *citoyen*. Have you never been to the Conciergerie before?”

“No; never.”

Now was his chance! Barassin had a subject to interest the Incorruptible, and he launched forth into a long description, overcrowded with details.

On the other side of that little door to the right was the ward of the male prisoners. Here at the end was the women’s courtyard, facing the arched building in which were their cells. Robespierre had but to advance a little, and he could see through the gate the fountain in which they washed their linen, for they remained dainty to the last, and wished to ascend the scaffold in spotless clothes. Barassin laughed a loud brutish laugh, happy at the seeming interest Robespierre took in his explanations.

“Is the Recorder’s office on the left, then?” questioned the Incorruptible, his eyes fixed on the dark gallery through which the turnkey had disappeared.

Barassin began another string of details. Yes,

that gallery led to it, and to the exit as well, through the concierge's lodge, where the condemned had their hair cut after the roll-call.

"The call takes place here, just where you are standing," he explained.

Robespierre started, and moved away. His eyes rested on the long line of cells, whose doors were lost in long perspective under the vaulted archway he had noticed on his entrance, and which had seemed so vast through the iron bars of the second gate. He lowered his voice to ask if those cells were occupied. Barassin's reply reassured him; there was no one there just then. Then, indicating a cell opposite Robespierre, the watchman continued, carried away by his subject —

"This is the cell in which the Queen was locked up."

He opened a panel in the door that Robespierre might glance within. The Incorruptible hesitated at first, and as he bent over resolutely to look, Barassin found further material for his questionable wit :

"It's not such a palace as her Versailles, eh?"

Robespierre quickly closed the aperture, on the outside of which he perceived a black cross.

"What! a cross?" he exclaimed, staring the while at the sign of redemption.

The watchman told him that some prisoner had probably daubed this cross on the panel after the Queen's death. The prisoners always stopped before it to pray, and it was their habit to scribble in

that way over the prison walls with pencils, or even nails.

“Why, here’s your name!” he chuckled, highly amused.

Robespierre shuddered.

“My name?”

Barassin raised his lantern, throwing the light on an inscription in large letters on the wall, under some prison notices.

The Incorruptible read —

“We shall be avenged, Robespierre, monster! your turn will come!”

The watchman swung his lantern from place to place, lighting up, for the Incorruptible’s benefit, other ominous inscriptions addressed to him.

“Robespierre, the tyrant!”

“Robespierre, the assassin!”

The Incorruptible turned pale.

He was well accustomed to insult and abuse, no doubt, but these imprecations on the walls, in that gruesome and silent prison, seemed like the last curses of the dead, written in letters of fire and blood!

“They must occupy themselves, I suppose!” remarked Barassin, still laughing.

The Incorruptible turned away, feeling ill at ease. Again he questioned the man, fixing him the while as if he would fathom the depths of his experience. Did he keep watch every night? He must have witnessed some heart-rending scenes? Was he not disturbed in his sleep, living thus in continual

contact with the dread spectre of death? Could he really sleep? Did not the cries of the victims disturb his slumber? Was he not haunted by their solemn leavetakings and their sobs?

Citoyen Robespierre could rest assured! Barassin slept soundly enough! Such fancies were very well for women! In the first place, the dead never returned, and then, after all, it was not Barassin who killed the victims, was it?

Steps were heard advancing, and the turnkey made his reappearance. The registrar had gone away and taken the keys with him. It was impossible to get at the prison register. He then suggested that Robespierre should go with him to the men's ward.

"Let us awake the prisoners. If the man you seek is there you will easily recognize him."

The Incorruptible refused, starting involuntarily. He had no wish to be seen by the prisoners.

Then, there was but one course left. Barrassin might accompany him, and speak to the men's turnkey, who would look for this Germain from bed to bed, and Barassin would bring back to Robespierre the result of the inquiry, as he himself had to return to his post. Robespierre would have to wait a little while, of course. And Collas moved the watchman's chair towards him.

"Very good! I will wait, but be quick!"

The two men went away, turning to the left, through the small gate, which Barassin carefully



closed behind him. Robespierre followed the watchman with his eyes.

“Happy brute! He can sleep in peace!” he exclaimed.

So this man’s sleep was not disturbed by such horrible visions as haunted Robespierre! But then, as the watchman said, *he* had not killed the victims; his name had not been inscribed on these walls as a term and brand of infamy and hatred.

That writing on the wall seemed to be dancing before his eyes. “Robespierre, assassin; your turn will come!” So this was the cry which rose from every breast! If he was vanquished in the morrow’s struggle, if he had to ascend the scaffold without having accomplished the act of social regeneration of which he had so long dreamt, he would leave behind him the execrated memory of a despot and bloodthirsty tyrant! His name would be coupled with all the monsters of history! Robespierre would be cited by posterity side by side with Nero, Caligula, Tiberius!

Stepping slowly towards the watchman’s seat, he sat down sideways, his eyes fixed, like a somnambulist’s, and his arm resting on the back of the chair, as he repeated in a low murmur —

“Your turn will come!”

Almost the same dread, ominous words had the night before forced him to start up suddenly, and impelled him to rush towards the window of his room.

“ Arise, Robespierre, arise ! Your hour has come ! ”

It was the shade of Camille Desmoulins that had uttered the grim summons ! Camille, accompanied by his wife, the pale and sweet Lucile, sought to draw him to them, to drag him along with them on the blood-strewn way to which they had been doomed ! But the phantoms had all vanished with the refreshing dawn. It was fever, of course ! He was subject to it ; it peopled his sleep with harrowing visions and fearful dreams. But these were nothing but excited hallucinations, creatures of his overwrought brain. . . .

Robespierre had now closed his eyes, overcome with fatigue, and still continued the thread of his thoughts and fancies. His ideas were becoming confused. He was vaguely wondering whether such imaginings were due to fever after all ? If this was not the case, it was perhaps his conscience that awakened from its torpor, and rose at night to confront him with his victims ? Yes, his conscience that relentlessly gnawed at his heart-strings, and wrung from him a gasping confession of alarm ! Had not Fouquier-Tinville seen the Seine one night from his terrace rolling waves of blood ? This was also a mere delusion . . . the outcome of remorse, perhaps ? Remorse ? Why ? Remorse for a just deed, for a work of redemption ? No ! It sprung rather from a diseased imagination caused by an over-excited and over-active brain,

which, weakened by excess, clothed the simplest objects with supernatural attributes.

Robespierre's eyes were now half-closed, and wandered dreamily to the women's courtyard, where grey arches stood out in clear and sharp relief under the soft moonlight. He was in deep reverie, wondering what could be the true cause of such strange illusions, and as he wondered, examples from past history came crowding to his mind.

Yes . . . did not Brutus imagine that he saw the shade of Cæsar gliding into his tent, when it could have been nothing but the flicker of a lamp on the curtains moved by the wind, or a moonbeam playing, as that one yonder, on a pillar?

As he gazed his eyes dilated in horror. It was no moonbeam. The outlines of a woman's form, ethereal and transparent, stood motionless against the pillar. It moved! Another form, white and shadowy, glided towards the first, and a third emerged from the dim background and joined them. Robespierre followed every movement with horror-stricken gaze. He rose, crept nearer: was he awake, or was it indeed a dream? Had he again fallen a prey to delusions at the very moment when he was persuading himself of their unreality? He was not asleep! He was wide awake! He felt the hot blood coursing through his veins, he walked to and fro, and was completely self-possessed! He knew he was at the Conciergerie, and had come to fetch his son Olivier. A little while ago he had

conversed with two men there, on that very spot, the turnkey and the night watchman. And yet his nervous imagination conjured up before his eyes those chimerical visions clothed with the semblance of reality! For, of course, he was not deceived, he knew well enough they were unreal delusions, and yet he felt nervous and ill at ease!

“What strange beings we are!” he thought. “Poor human nature! We pride ourselves on our strength of mind, and yet we are subject to such hallucinations!”

Again he was startled from his musings. Other forms suddenly appeared in the white moonlit courtyard, walking slowly up and down, in pairs, singly, or in groups. They came and went, stopped, conversed with or took leave of each other, all in a great hush, without seeming to notice the Incorruptible, who in his fear kept as much as possible aloof, never moving his eyes from them a moment.

Suddenly, he uttered a cry. He had bent forward to examine their features and had recognised . . . Madame Roland! . . . Madame Roland! . . . and Madame Elizabeth, the king's sister; . . . Good God! and there was Charlotte Corday, the girl who had killed Marat! The courtyard filled with new forms, blanched and wan, gliding about with supernatural grace in the pale moonlight. Robespierre stood rooted to the spot, seized with wild terror.

“Am I mad?” he asked himself.

Ghosts! Yes, they were ghosts! What! was he going to believe in ghosts, like old women and children? It was folly, crass folly, and he repeated aloud — “Madness! sheer madness!”

But what did it all mean! What were those wandering forms which reminded him of beings long dead? Were they subtle effluences of their bodies that could pass through the prison walls, invisible by day, but luminous at night, as phosphorescent spectres were said to flit among tombstones in churchyards by moonlight, to the dismay of the weak and credulous.

“Yes, the weak and credulous!” he repeated, in a voice which quavered none the less, “the weak and credulous, easily prone to fear and remorse . . .”

He went towards the gate of the men’s ward livid with fright, in the hope that the watchman would come and put an end to these harrowing phantasms.

He cried out in desperation —

“Does the man never mean to come!”

At that moment a man’s form appeared in the gallery to his right, and he went towards it hopefully. Barassin? But he recoiled. No! it was not he! The form grew more distinct, others followed. There were now six, eight, ten, twenty of them, a band of prisoners slowly and silently moving towards the gate. They were coming, all coming! He recognised them:

“The Girondins! . . . Brissot! . . . Vergniaud! . . .”

Were all his victims then going to show themselves behind those iron bars like avengers, to torture and madden him?

Robespierre was suddenly dazzled by a stream of moonlight illuminating an iron grating just above him, which he had not noticed on his entrance. Outlines of fresh forms appeared behind the bars, gradually growing more distinct. They were the ghosts of other victims! For he recognised them, while they, apparently, were unconscious of his presence.

He took his eyes off these for a moment to see if the spectres gathered behind the grating of the ground floor were still there. Yes! They were still there. They were everywhere then? Everywhere! . . . What were they doing? Why did they come and force the past upon him in this way? After spending the day in struggling with the living, must his nights be spent in encounters with the dead? He continued staring in mute and fascinated horror, as motionless as those ghosts gathered behind the closed grill, and seeming to await the gruesome roll-call of the condemned.

At their silence he presently took heart. None of them had their eyes fixed on him. This was proof, he thought, that they existed only in his imagination. For, after all, if they were real, they would have stared at him in anger, with terrible and threatening looks . . . they would have rushed upon him, one

and all. Those iron barriers would have yielded to their united effort, and burst asunder!

Even as he thought this the gratings swung back noiselessly.

Robespierre recoiled, his flesh creeping, cold beads of perspiration starting on his forehead.

The gates had opened! It was all true then! They were real! The whole array of spectres was coming down upon him! They were advancing slowly, they were entering the courtyard! No, they had not seen him! Robespierre was still retreating, step by step.

“They haven’t seen me!” he gasped. If he could gain the passage to the left of the archway, which was the only exit available, he was safe! He would escape them! For they were not likely to follow him into the street. . . .

He reached the vaulted passage, stepping cautiously backwards, keeping them in sight all the while, like a criminal in dread of detection. But at the entrance of the passage Danton and Camille Desmoulins confronted him.

“Danton! Camille!”

He started back, shaking with fear. Every exit was barred!

These two noted victims were advancing carelessly, conversing together. They had not noticed him either!

The door of the Queen’s cell now moved.

What! was that going to open too?

Marie Antoinette appeared on the threshold, descended the few steps and joined the others, who all made deep obeisance at the approach of their sovereign.

The Queen! it was indeed the Queen!

Robespierre felt now that he was lost. Flight had become impossible. The one remaining means of escape was by the little grating of the men's courtyard. He tried to reach it, still walking backwards, without once losing sight of the apparitions, his arms stretched behind him, every muscle strained, and both hands clenched convulsively. He soon came in contact with the grating, and tried to push it open with his back. Not succeeding he abruptly turned round. It was locked! He tried madly to force it, but the massive iron bars proved too much for his strength. He seized and shook the lattice in his agony. The rattling noise made him turn quickly, thinking all the spectres had come down upon him. But no! They stood still in the same places, motionless, and apparently unconscious of his presence. But this could not last; . . . they must see him sooner or later! And if he were seen he would surely be the prey of these arisen tenants of the tomb! He wiped the cold sweat from his brow, panting and breathless, and made a sudden frantic effort in his overwhelming panic to repel the ghastly vision, turning away from it.

"It is absurd! The dead never return!" he cried, stamping violently.



He persuaded himself that it was only necessary to disbelieve in it and the vision would fade, to refuse to look, and he would no longer see the phantoms. He then turned round boldly, as if to prove his words.

Every eye was upon him. They appeared terrible in the awful majesty of their wrongs, as if accusing him, as if judging him. He remained motionless, terror-stricken. Yes, they were all looking at him! Slowly, silently they glided towards him.

“Oh! no further! no further!” he cried. “I implore you! I am frightened! . . .”

Every limb trembled, as he thus prayed them to desist.

“Oh yes! I know what you are going to say, I see the word trembling on your lips: ‘Assassin!’”

The victims seemed to him to bend their heads in mute assent. He feared they would speak, and hastened to prevent them. . . . Yes, he was an assassin, he knew it! . . . It was just and right they should call him so! He knew, yes, he knew, what they wanted of him. . . . He must set free the prisoners, overthrow the scaffold?

The victims again nodded approval.

Yes! . . . Yes! . . . he would do everything, anything they asked. He swore it to them. . . .

“But in pity go! I entreat you! Oh go! in pity, go and leave me!”

The spectres remained motionless, their eyes still fixed upon him.

"Mercy!" he cried. "Have mercy!"

Yes, mercy! . . . he begged for mercy! Their looks would kill him! He could not bear it any longer! It was too much! His fright now bordered on madness, and he cried out: "Let me alone! I am frightened! horribly frightened!"

So saying he tottered forward, ready to drop from exhaustion, and tried to grasp the back of the chair for support. But it gave way.

"Help! help!" he screamed.

"Hullo! who's calling?" cried a voice outside.

It was Barassin returning from the registrar's office. He opened the grating and entered, then drew back in bewilderment at the sight of Robespierre on the ground, his head buried in his hands. The watchman at once thought that he must have fallen asleep on the chair, and slipped on to the paved courtyard. He laid down his lantern, and tried to raise the Incorruptible. Robespierre awoke and lifted his haggard eyes. At sight of the man he violently pushed him away.

"I see, you're not quite awake yet!" laughed Barassin.

Robespierre rubbed his eyes, and looked anxiously around.

"You've had a dream? . . . A nightmare, eh?"

"Yes!" answered Robespierre, now himself again. "I have had a fearful dream." Then rising with difficulty, he fell exhausted on the chair which the watchman held out to him.

Barassin now told Robespierre the result of his quest. They had interrogated the prisoners, from bed to bed. The young man he sought was not among them.

Robespierre, still uneasy, and casting anxious and furtive glances in every corner, expressed his thanks.

Suddenly he rose and seized Barassin by the arm.

“Are we alone, here?” he asked.

“Why, yes!” answered the man in some surprise.

“Then let us go!” said Robespierre, impatiently, “let us go at once!”

Barassin took his lantern, and walked in front.

“This way!” he said, opening the wicket through which they had entered.

In the gallery Robespierre again seized the man’s arm, and bent forward to see if the way was clear; then feeling immense relief, he rushed towards the exit, almost running, and followed with difficulty by Barassin, who with the lantern dangling in his hand could scarcely keep pace with him.

“Hallo! Citoyen Robespierre!” he panted, “you’re going too fast!”

But the Incorruptible continued his headlong flight.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE EVE OF THE BATTLE

ROBESPIERRE could breathe again. He was once more in the open, the silent stars above him, the Seine flecked with white bars of reflected moonlight, flowing at his feet. But he dared not linger there. He turned quickly, and darted along close to the walls, fearing that for him, as once for Fouquier-Tinville, the water would take the crimson hue of blood. By slow degrees he became calmer. Refreshing gusts of cool night air fanned his fevered brow, and restored him to reality. He thought of Olivier again. If he were not in the Conciergerie, where could he be?

Entering the inner court of the Tuileries, at first he seemed undecided, and then, as if under a sudden impulse, went straight towards the Pavilion of Liberty. The Committee of Public Safety held its meetings there, in the very apartment once occupied by Louis XVI. This committee usually worked far into the night, and Robespierre was sure of finding some one. As he expected, he met Billaud-Varennes and Collot d'Herbois, who were crossing the vestibule of the ground floor at that moment. He accosted them angrily, for the two

men, who had been hissed and hooted at the Jacobin Club, now seemed to exult, as though they held some secret threat over his head. The ironical smiles he fancied he saw playing round their lips aggravated his fury.

“So you have released the prisoner I sent to La Force?” he cried.

“Quite true!” replied Billaud-Varennes, relishing Robespierre’s discomfiture as a set-off against the Jacobins’ hooting.

“For what reason?”

“To cross-examine him.”

“Where is he?”

“That is for you to find out.”

“I command you to send him back immediately to La Force!”

“We receive no orders from you!”

“Then it is to be war between us? You shall have it, scoundrels! war to the knife! And to-morrow too!” and turning away abruptly, he went towards the steps, and pushed the door open in a violent rage.

Billaud-Varennes and Collot d’Herbois retraced their steps to apprise their colleagues at the Convention of their stormy interview with Robespierre. But on the threshold of the Assembly-room Billaud stopped his companion.

“Wait a moment,” he said, “let me cross-examine the young man first.”

So saying, he went upstairs to the attics, where

Olivier had been locked up ever since five o'clock under the charge of a gendarme, to whom Coulougeon, the Committee's agent, had confided him, with strict orders that the prisoner was to be kept entirely out of sight until the Committee had decided on his fate.

Coulougeon was one of the sharpest detectives of the Committee. It was he who, disguised as a beggar, had been the object of Blount's sudden barks in the forest of Montmorency, where he had witnessed the interview between Robespierre and Vaughan. Driven away by Robespierre's agents, he had gone immediately to the entrance of the forest, expecting vainly the Englishman's reappearance.

On his return to Paris the same evening he had reported his discovery at once to the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud-Varenes rubbed his hands gleefully. He was on the scent of a plot. An Englishman? That could be no other than Vaughan, Fox's agent, who was known to have been already two days in Paris. Ah! Robespierre had secret interviews with him, had he? A plot, of course! It was splendid! Nothing could be more opportune!

"Run quickly, and ascertain if the Englishman is still at the American Consulate, while we draw up the warrant of arrest!" was his immediate order.

But at the Consulate the detective was told that

Vaughan had just left Paris. Suspecting a trick, he took other means to continue his inquiries, only to find after all that the Englishman had started for Geneva directly after leaving Montmorency.

The members of the Committee were greatly disappointed on learning that the plot must remain unravelled, for how could they prove the interview without witnesses? Coulongeon was the only one who had seen Robespierre speaking with Vaughan, but he was in the pay of the Committee, and no one would believe him. They rested their hopes on the probable return of the Englishman, but they waited to no purpose, and were finally obliged to abandon the attempt.

One evening, however, Coulongeon had brought the Committee an unlooked-for piece of news. Having had a message to take to the prison of La Bourbe, he had found himself in the Acacia courtyard among the prisoners just at their supper-hour. Two female prisoners had attracted his attention. It seemed to him as if it was not the first time he had seen them, and after searching his memory for a moment, he recognised them as the two women who were with Vaughan in the forest of Montmorency before Robespierre arrived on the scene. Yes, he remembered it all now! It was so! There was not the slightest doubt! The gaoler, when questioned, completely confirmed his suspicions. The women did come from Montmorency, where they had been arrested by Robespierre's orders.

“Now we have two witnesses!” Billaud-Varennes cried in delight.

“Three!” the agent interjected. “For, now I come to think of it, there was a young man with them.”

“He must be found also! Quick to Montmorency, and bring him back with you!”

At Montmorency, after two days of fruitless search, the detective discovered Clarisse’s house in the forest. The gardener on being interrogated replied that he was completely ignorant of the whereabouts of Olivier, who had disappeared the very day his mother and his *fiancée* were arrested. . . . Perhaps Leonard the locksmith could tell him. Questioned in his turn, Leonard replied evasively. Coulongeon then informed him who he was, and threatened him with the law, so that Leonard ended by owning that the young man had started the same night for Paris. He swore that was all he knew. Coulongeon, pretending to be quite satisfied, thanked him and went away. But returning soon after he adroitly questioned the neighbours on Leonard’s connections and acquaintances. The agent learnt that when the locksmith went to Paris he took up his abode in furnished apartments in the Rue de Rocher, kept by a certain widow Beaugrand.

“Now I am on the right track,” thought Coulongeon.

Once back in Paris the agent had little difficulty in making the good woman speak. Did the widow



Beugrand know the young man? *Pardieu!* She knew him too well! He was the daring insulter of Robespierre, the young madman arrested on the Fête of the Supreme Being who was now imprisoned at La Force.

The joy of the Committee knew no bounds, when they learnt the news on leaving the hall of the Convention on the 8th Thermidor.

Billaud-Varennès, as can be imagined, was also overjoyed.

“We will have the three prisoners out of gaol, at once, and keep them here at hand.”

Two orders of release had been immediately drafted, one for the prison of La Bourbe, the other for La Force.

Coulangeon had gone first of all to La Force to fetch Olivier, whom he conducted straight to the Tuileries and locked in a little chamber above the Committee-room under charge of a gendarme. But at the prison of La Bourbe he was too late; the two women had been taken away by Lebas, under an order of release from Robespierre.

On his return the police-agent had sought Billaud-Varennès to apprise him of the result of his errand, but finding that he was away until after the meeting of the Jacobins, he left a sealed note for him with full particulars.

Billaud received this on his return from the Jacobins accompanied by Collot d’Herbois.

“Out of three witnesses, only one is left to us!”

he exclaimed on reading it. "The most important one, however! We have the man himself who insulted the traitor! We must cross-examine him directly. It will be amusing."

Robespierre just then appeared on the scene and hastened the examination by his violent outburst.

Billaud-Varenes began to cross-examine Olivier in the little chamber above the Committee-room. The young man knew nothing of the plot. Robespierre might have had an interview with Vaughan in the forest, this was very possible, but he, Olivier, had left just after the Englishman's arrival.

"You spoke to him, I suppose?"

"To whom?"

"To Vaughan."

"Why, yes! I exchanged a few words with him."

"You knew him, then?"

"My mother knew him. He was an old friend of hers."

"She knew then what he came to Montmorency for?"

"Not in the least. It was quite a chance-meeting. He had lost his way, when they . . ."

"And you know absolutely nothing of what passed after your departure?"

"Nothing, except that my mother and my *fiancée* were arrested by Robespierre's infamous orders."

Billaud-Varenes left the room greatly disappointed. He wondered if, after all, Olivier was telling the truth.

“However, the young man has the night to reflect over it,” he said to himself, as he descended the stair. “I will question him again to-morrow after having conferred with the Committee, perhaps by that time he will have decided to speak! And yet I cannot but think he was sincere.”

With this he re-entered the room where his colleagues were assembled. But such an extraordinary scene of animation presented itself when he opened the door that he forgot the object of his visit.

This Committee-room, like the others next to it, formed part of a suite of apartments recently belonging to the King. It offered a strange spectacle, with its mixture of elegance and vulgarity, which said more than words for the ravages of the Revolution.

Over the five doors, two of which opened on to a long corridor, the royal arms surmounted by a crown had been roughly erased. The walls and panels of the doors were covered with printed decrees of the Convention, and tricolour placards were pasted up everywhere. This array of Revolutionary literature struck the observer as at once ominous and pathetic, in the midst of all the grace and beauty of that white and gold reception-room, decorated in the purest Louis XV. style, with its daintily carved cornices and painted ceiling, where Nymphs and Cupids sported in the glowing spring-tide among flowers. The contrast was even more apparent in the furniture. Gilded armchairs covered with rare tapestry,

now all torn, stood side by side with plain deal seats, some of which were very rickety. A side-board laden with eatables and wine-bottles completed the installation of the Terror in the palace of the Tuileries.

Billaud-Varennes was still standing there on the threshold. Collot d'Herbois, surrounded by Barère, Carnot, Prieur, and Elie Lacoste, was violently addressing Saint-Just, Robespierre's friend, who was seated at the table, engaged in writing the speech he was to deliver before the Convention on the morrow. Saint-Just, calm and contemptuous, replied to their insults by a shrug of the shoulders. This disdain exasperated Collot d'Herbois beyond measure, and Saint-Just aggravated him still more by ironical inquiries about the Jacobins' meeting.

"You are nothing more than a traitor!" cried Collot; "it is our indictment you are drawing up there, I suppose?"

"Yes, traitor! threefold traitor!" exclaimed Elie Lacoste. "Traitor and perjurer, you form with Robespierre and Couthon a triumvirate of calumny, falsehood, and betrayal."

Saint-Just, without losing self-possession a moment, stopped in his writing, and coldly offered to read them his speech.

Barère disdainfully refused to listen.

"We fear neither you nor your accomplices! You are but a child, Couthon a miserable cripple, and as to Robespierre . . ."

At this moment an usher brought in a letter to Barère. He looked uneasy after he had read it, and signed to his colleagues to follow, leaving Saint-Just free to continue his work. In the lobby Barère told them it was a letter from Lecointre announcing the approaching attack upon the Committee by the troops of the Commune, and offering the battalion of his section for their defence.

“It is exactly as I told you!” cried Elie Lacoste. “The leaders of the Commune must be instantly arrested, and with them Robespierre and his two accomplices!”

“Commencing with Saint-Just and his speech,” said Collot.

“Robespierre was here just now,” observed Billaud-Varennes, who had followed his colleagues out of the room; “he wanted to know what we had done with the prisoner from La Force. We told him we had not to render account to him, whereupon he went away in a rage, crying out, ‘You want war? War you shall have then!’ We have been warned by the Incorruptible himself, you see!”

“Yes, but we shall crush him through his Englishman! We have witnesses enough now!”

“Nay, unhappily we have not!” replied Billaud.

“What! we have no witnesses?” exclaimed Barère in surprise. “What do you mean? . . . Has not Coulongeon . . . ?”

“Coulongeon arrived too late at La Bourbe

Lebas had just taken them off, by Robespierre's orders — no one knows whither."

"Oh! the villain! he suspected something, then, and abducted them to suppress their evidence; but we have at any rate the young man from La Force."

"He is upstairs, but he knows nothing."

"He lies, he is a traitor!"

"No, he seemed quite sincere, and he execrates Robespierre; but I shall question him again tomorrow."

"And meanwhile we must resort to stratagem," remarked Barère.

They discussed and debated the question, and all came to the conclusion that Barère was right. Their safety lay in stratagem. After all, there was no immediate peril. Robespierre was not fond of violent measures, he would not break the bounds of the law unless driven to it. It was out of sheer vexation that he had thrown that challenge in Billaud-Varennes' face; and after all, since Saint-Just had again assured them of the Incorruptible's pure intentions, it would be perhaps prudent to dissemble and to disarm the triumvirate by simulating confidence.

On the whole the members of the Committee were undecided, hesitating between two alternatives, one as dangerous as the other. Either they must openly attack Robespierre and overthrow him, and thus add to the already unbounded power of the Committee, which would then more easily crush the

Convention; or they must leave the power in Robespierre's hands, who, when once master, would lose no time in annihilating them.

The members returned to the Committee-room where Saint-Just was still writing. They spoke as if they had altered their mind on thinking things over. They regretted their hasty words, for after all the patriotism of Robespierre and his friends had stood a long test. They spoke of precautions to be taken in case of an unexpected attack, for warnings had reached them from every quarter. All this was discussed aloud before Saint-Just, ostensibly to show their complete confidence in him.

Saint-Just, to all appearance the dupe of their hypocrisy, assured them they were unnecessarily alarmed. If the Jacobins and the Commune had formed any projects against the Committee, he would have heard of it. There was certainly considerable excitement in the streets among the people whose anger had been aroused at the calumnies to which Robespierre had been subject. But the Incorruptible would soon calm them down. As far as he, Saint-Just, was concerned, he was ready to forget the somewhat hasty words which one of his colleagues had addressed to him in the heat of the moment.

Collot d'Herbois upon a sign from Barère feigned to regret his hasty speech, which was, of course, he said, the outcome of excitement. It was so easy in these times of anger and enmity to be carried away

by the fever of the moment. The dissensions of the Committee were making them the laughing-stock of their enemies.

Saint-Just, cold and impassive as before, quietly assented, and meanwhile continued to draft his speech, and when he had finished put it in his pocket, and looked up at the clock. It was five in morning.

“At ten, the speech will be copied, and I shall read it to you before the sitting, so that there may be no unpleasantness,” said Saint-Just, rising to go.

Taking his hat and stick, he moved off, the others, to all appearance reassured, pretending to do likewise; but Saint-Just had no sooner disappeared than they returned to the Committee-room. It was agreed to send for the three leaders suspected of assisting Robespierre in the insurrection: Hauriot, the Commander of the troops; Payan, the Commune agent; and Fleuriot-Lescot, Mayor of Paris. The ushers returned with the two last named, but Hauriot was not to be found. For the space of four hours they retained Payan and Fleuriot-Lescot, smoking, drinking, eating, talking, and discussing, in the sultry and oppressive heat which heralded the near approach of a storm. They thus held them in check for the time being, overwhelming them meanwhile with questions, to which they replied in terms that tended to calm the anxiety of the Committee.

During this time the Parisian populace, who had not slept either, had entered the Convention, the



assembly-hall of which, situated also in the palace of the Tuileries, within ear-shot of the Committee, had been filling since five o'clock that morning, though the sitting was not to commence until noon.

Every moment messengers arrived at the Committee-room, ushers out of breath bringing news, messages, and reports in an endless succession, which increased as the hours advanced. Payan and Fleuriot-Lescot had just left, after completely reassuring the Committee. It was now half-past ten, and the sitting was opened. Saint-Just did not put in an appearance, but the thump of crutches was heard in the corridor, announcing the arrival of Couthon, the cripple.

“Where is Saint-Just?”

“He is coming!”

For one hour Couthon kept the Committee in suspense, entertaining them with Saint-Just's favourite theme, Robespierre's single-minded patriotism, but still no Saint-Just appeared. The Committee began to feel annoyed, and soon Carnot, who suspected treachery, spoke out boldly. It was nothing less, he said, than a preconcerted plan between Couthon, Saint-Just, and Robespierre.

Couthon protested.

“You do wrong to speak ill of the patriot Robespierre! You are basely calumniating a friend of your childhood!”

“If I am base, you are a traitor!” retorted Carnot, beside himself with rage.

But Couthon, anticipating a storm, took up his crutches and stumped off, protesting as he went. Sinister sounds now reached the Committee. They had been betrayed! Saint-Just was going to denounce them from the tribune! The document he had been drafting before them, there on that table, was nothing more or less than the indictment of the Committee! Barère had just received trustworthy information to that effect. Robespierre had drawn up a list of eighteen names of those destined for the scaffold. A deputy entered and asked for Billaud-Varennes. He was told that Billaud had just gone out, but would return shortly.

“Ah! Here is Fouché!” some one exclaimed.

It was in truth Fouché, the deputy, who now entered. He was beset with questions. Yes! they were not mistaken, he told them. Robespierre was now going to throw off the mask, and denounce some of his colleagues. “And I am sure he has not forgotten me,” added Fouché, ironically.

He was immediately surrounded by eager questioners. The names? Did he know the names? they asked anxiously. Fouché did not know; but everybody was threatened, and each must look after himself; the sitting would soon begin.

All turned their eyes anxiously to the clock. It was not yet noon; they had still twelve minutes! Now another deputy came in, breathless with the news that Robespierre had just entered the Hall of

the Convention, with his brother Augustin, Couthon, Saint-Just, Lebas, and all his followers. The galleries, crowded to excess, had received the Incorruptible with loud cheers.

"Hark, the rabble are applauding; he has hired his usual *claque*," said one.

"That's true," another answered. "Since five this morning the Robespierrists, male and female, have taken possession of the galleries, yelling, feasting, and drinking."

"They are already drunk."

"Well! Let us go and offer our heads to the drunkards!" exclaimed Fouché.

But just then a door on the right opened, and Billaud-Varennes entered. Every one paused.

"Here is Billaud at last."

Billaud was looking anxious, and wiping his brow, worn out with the heat, he asked for a glass of beer. They eagerly questioned him.

"Was it true, then? They would have to fight?"

"Yes! fight to the death. They ought to have listened to him. Robespierre had told him plainly enough that there would be war. And now that they could not prove the plot. . . ."

"What plot?" asked Fouché.

"Ah, yes! It's true; you don't know. . . ."

Billaud made a sign to shut the doors, as Robespierre had spies in all the corridors. The doors securely closed, Billaud-Varennes again told the

story of the Englishman. Fouché listened with curiosity. Other members, Vadier, Amar, Voullaud, who had just entered, also followed Billaud's story with keen interest, while those who already knew of the plot, came and went, deep in discussion, waiting for Billaud to finish, to give their opinion.

Billaud-Vareennes now produced the order of release for the two women, signed by Robespierre, and brought from the prison of La Bourbe by Coulongeon.

"There can be no doubt. We have in this quite enough to ruin him," said Fouché; "but what about that young man from La Force?"

"I questioned him again closely just now in the next room. He persists in his first statement, which appears to me quite genuine — as genuine as is his rage against Robespierre, whom he regrets, he says, not to have stabbed at the Fête of the Supreme Being."

"Ah! if he had! what a riddance!" was the cry with which one and all greeted Billaud's last words.

"True; but he has not done it," observed Fouché drily. "As to the plot, it has escaped our grasp."

"Not so," some one remarked; "his treason is evident."

A warm discussion ensued. The treachery was obvious to the Committee, but it would not be so in the eyes of the public. It must be proved. And where was the Englishman? Where were

the women? To accuse Robespierre thus, without sufficient proof, was sheer folly. The only witness available, the agent Coulangeon, was in the pay of the Committee. Robespierre would make a speech on it, call it a concocted plan, and annihilate his accusers with an oratorical flourish.

"Nothing truer!" remarked another deputy.

"He has only to open his mouth and every one trembles."

"Very well; let us gag him," said Fouché. "It's the only means of putting an end to it all."

They looked at him, not quite catching his meaning. Fouché explained his idea. They had but to drown Robespierre's voice at the sitting by their clamour. They had but to howl, scream, vociferate; the people in the galleries would protest noisily, and their outcry would add to the tumult. Robespierre would strain his voice in vain to be heard above the uproar, and then fall back exhausted and vanquished.

"That's it," they cried unanimously.

Billaud also thought this an excellent idea, and at once began to arrange for letting all their friends know as soon as possible, for Robespierre must be prevented from uttering a single audible word. Every one approved. Just then a door opened.

"Be quick! Saint-Just is ascending the tribune!" called a voice.

"Very well. We may as well commence with him."

And they one and all made for the doors in an indescribable disorder.

“Now for it,” cried Billaud, laying his glass down on the sideboard.

But meanwhile Fouché signed to Vadier, Amar, and Voullaud to remain. They looked at him in surprise. Fouché waited for the noise to subside, then assuring himself that no one could overhear him, he confided his fears to them. It was not everything to drown Robespierre’s voice. Even arrested, condemned, and on the death-tumbril, his hands bound, Robespierre would still be dangerous; a sudden rush and riot could deliver him, and crush them all! Then lowering his voice, he continued —

“The young madman of whom Billaud spoke just now. . . .”

“Well?”

“Where is he?”

Amar pointed to a door on the left.

“Let him come in!” said Fouché; “I will speak to him in the name of the Committee.”

They did not yet quite grasp his meaning, but Voullaud went all the same and opened the door.

“Hush!” said Fouché, “here is the young man!”

Olivier entered, followed by a gendarme, who, on seeing Fouché and the other members, stopped on the threshold. Olivier looked at them indifferently, expecting to be again cross-examined about the Englishman. Fouché had taken his hat and put it on, as if going out.

“ Young man, you were the first to charge the despot, whom we are about to fight, with his crimes ! This is sufficient to recommend you to the indulgence of the Committee.”

As Olivier advanced in astonishment, he continued —

“ You may go if you like ! ”

Fouché turned to the gendarme —

“ The citizen is free ! ”

The gendarme retired.

Vadier now understood Fouché's idea. Taking up his hat also, he remarked —

“ And if our enemy is victorious, take care not to fall again into his clutches ! ”

Olivier who was preparing to go, stopped suddenly. Unhappily, he said, he had not only himself to tremble for. His mother and *fiancée* were in prison and Robespierre would revenge himself on them.

“ Most probably ! ” replied Fouché.

“ Then the Committee ought to release them also, and with even more reason ! ”

Fouché shrugged his shoulders regretfully.

It had been the intention of the Committee, but the two prisoners were beyond their reach.

“ How ? ” asked Olivier anxiously.

Simply because they were no longer at the prison of La Bourbe.

Olivier gasped —

“ Condemned ? ”

"Not yet! But Lebas had taken them away with an order from Robespierre."

Here Fouché, picking up the order left on the table by Billaud-Varenes, showed it to Olivier, who read it in horrified amazement.

"Where are they then," he cried.

"At the Conciergerie, where they would be judged within twenty-four hours."

"The wretch! the wretch!"

He implored them that they might be released. The Committee were all-powerful! — They, powerful, indeed? They looked at him pityingly. He believed that? What simplicity! How could they release the two women when they were on the point of being sacrificed themselves? They would have difficulty enough to save their own heads!

"To-morrow," continued Fouché, "we shall most likely be with your mother, at the foot of the scaffold."

Olivier looked at them in terror. Was it possible? Was there no one that could be found to kill this dangerous wild beast?

Fouché, who had consulted his colleagues in a rapid glance, now felt the moment ripe.

"Assassinate him, you mean?" he asked.

Olivier lost all self-control. Is a mad dog assassinated? He is killed, that's all! What did it matter if the one who did it were torn to pieces; he would have had his revenge, and would save further victims.



“Certainly,” said Fouché, “and if Robespierre is victorious, it is the only chance of saving your mother.”

“But don’t rely on that!” Vadier remarked.

Amar went even further.

“Patriots like Brutus are not often found!” he said.

But Olivier cried out in his fury that only one was wanted, and then looked about for the door.

“Which is the way out?”

Vadier pointed to the exit.

“Thank you, citoyens! . . . Adieu! *au revoir!*”

The four men silently watched him disappear, and then looked at each other. . . . Would he do it? It was not impossible!

“Meanwhile, let us go and howl!” suggested Fouché.

And they rushed into the Convention-room.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A BROKEN IDOL

SAINT-JUST is in the tribune. Collot d'Herbois occupies the presidential chair, Collot who, at two in the morning, suspecting Saint-Just's treachery, had openly charged him with it. War is in the air, and every member is at his post.

Fouché looks round for Robespierre as he crosses to his seat. There he is; in the semicircle before the bust of Brutus, at the foot of the tribune which he seems to guard like a vigilant sentinel.

"He is dressed as he was at the Fête of the Supreme Being," whispers Fouché ironically to his neighbour.

Yes, the Incorruptible has on his sky-blue coat, white-silk embroidered waistcoat, and nankeen knee-breeches buttoned over white stockings, nor has he omitted the powder and the curls. What a strange figure, with his dapper daintiness, his old-fashioned attire, in that seething furnace of fifteen hundred people, actors and spectators, so closely packed, and, most of them with bared breasts, suffocating in the awful heat which oppresses them! The *sans-culottes* up in the gallery have even taken off their traditional red nightcaps, which they hang on

the handles of their sword-sticks like bloodstained trophies.

It is as they expected. Since five the hall has been taken possession of by Robespierrists. All the worst scum of Paris has gathered there; all the bloodhounds of the Revolution, all the riff-raff who accompany the death-tumbrils to the scaffold to the song of the *Carmagnole*; fish-wives and rowdies, recruited and hired at twenty-four sous apiece to drown with their vociferations every hostile attempt made against the idol of the Commune.

This brutish mob, reeking of sausages, pressed meat, gingerbread and beer, eating and drinking, poison the atmosphere of the Hall.

Robespierre's arrival at twelve o'clock is hailed by repeated rounds of loud applause, which he acknowledges with a gracious bow, proud and smiling. Turning to Lebas who accompanies him, he remarks, "Did I not tell you it would be a success?"

So certain is he of victory that before starting he had set the Duplays quite at ease as to the issue of the struggle. "Believe me," he had said, "the greater part of the Convention are unbiassed."

But suddenly, at the commencement of the sitting, when Saint-Just appears in the tribune, a counter movement makes itself felt in the assembly. Robespierre realising the importance of at once preventing any hostile demonstration, advances to the foot of the tribune, determined to daunt his opponents by a bold front. Saint-Just at once renews

the accusation brought against the Committee by the Incorruptible the day before, accentuating it without mentioning names.

It is now that the anti-Robespierrist plot, admirably planned, begins to work.

Tallien, one of the conspirators, breaks in upon Saint-Just violently.

“Enough of these vague accusations!” he cries. “The names! Let us have the names!”

Saint-Just, encouraged by a look from Robespierre, simply shrugs his shoulders, and continues. But his voice is immediately drowned in a thundering clamour, and in spite of the vehement protestations of Robespierre, he is unable to finish his speech. The anti-Robespierrist cabal are playing their part well. They simply roar.

Billaud-Varennes demands a hearing. He is already in the tribune, greeted by sustained applause.

Robespierre, growing excited, protests and persists in speaking, but his voice is drowned in cries of “Silence! Silence! Let Billaud-Varennes speak!” Collot d’Herbois rings the president’s bell, and adds to the noise under the pretext of repressing it.

“Let Billaud-Varennes speak! Let Billaud-Varennes speak!”

But Robespierre continues to protest —

“Don’t listen to that man! His words are but poisonous drivel!”

Immediately loud cries are heard —

“Order! Order! Robespierre is not in the tri-

bune ! Billaud-Varennes is in the tribune ! Silence ! Silence ! ”

And Robespierre, with a shrug of contempt, returns to his place.

Silence being gradually restored, Billaud-Varennes begins to speak.

“ I was at the Jacobins’ yesterday ; the room was crowded with men posted there to insult the National representatives, and to calumniate the Committee of Public Safety which devotes its days and nights to kneading bread for you, to forging arms and raising armies for you, to sending them forth to victory ! ”

A voice is heard in approval, and fresh applause breaks out ; but the gaze of the orator is fixed on that part of the assembly called the Mountain. He seems to recognise some one, at whom he points with lifted arm.

“ I see yonder, on the Mountain, one of the wretches who insulted us yesterday. There he stands ! ”

This is the signal for renewed uproar. Several members spring up and turn round towards the person indicated.

“ Yes, yes, behold him ! ” cries Billaud.

The agitation increases. Cries of “ To the door with him ! Turn him out ! ” are heard. The man pleads innocence, and tries to weather the storm, but seeing the majority against him escapes as best he can, mixes with the crowd and disappears. Silence is with difficulty restored among the infuriated members.

The orator continues, throwing violent and insidious phrases broadcast among the assembly like lighted fire-brands. His thrusts strike nearer home now; he accuses Robespierre openly to his face.

“You will shudder when I tell you that the soldiery is under the unscrupulous control of that man who has the audacity to place at the head of the section-men and artillery of the city the degraded Hauriot, and that without consulting you at all, solely according to his own will, for he listens to no other dictates. He has, he says, deserted the Committees because they oppressed him. He lies!”

Robespierre rises, his lips quivering at the insult, and attempts to reply from his place.

“Yes, you lie!” continues Billaud. “You left us because you did not find among us either partisans, flatterers, or accomplices in your infamous projects against Liberty. Your sole aim has been to sow dissension, to disunite us that you might attack us singly and remain in power at the head of drunkards and debauchees, like that secretary who stole a hundred and fifty thousand livres, and whom you took under your wing, you, the Incorruptible, you who make such boast of your strict virtue and integrity!”

Laughter, mixed with some applause is heard, but Robespierre shrugs his shoulders contemptuously at such vulgar abuse. Fouché, from his bench, laughs

loudly with the rest, and leaning towards his neighbour, whispers —

“Clever tactics! . . . Billaud is splendid!”

The speaker, in conclusion, appeals to the patriotism of the assembly, and implores the members to watch over its safety. If they do not take energetic measures against this madman, he says, the Convention is lost, for he only speaks of purifying it that he may send to the scaffold all those who stand in the way of his personal ambition. It is, he insists, the preservation of the Convention which is at stake, the safety of the Republic, the salvation of their country.

“I demand,” so runs his peroration, “that the Convention sit permanently until it has baffled the plans of this new Catiline, whose only aim is to cross the trench which still separates him from supremacy by filling it with our heads!”

Thunders of applause greet Billaud-Varennes' words; shouts, cheers, and waving of hands which continue long after he has left the tribune.

Robespierre now leaves his seat in great agitation, crying —

“It is all false, and I will prove it!”

But his words are again drowned in an uproar of voices, and cries of “Silence! Silence!”

“I will give the traitor his answer!” exclaims Robespierre, trying to make himself heard above the tumult which increases at every word he utters, so that his voice is now completely lost. Some of

the members rush into the semicircle, forming a living rampart round the tribune.

The din is dominated by a new voice from the presidential chair.

“Silence, let no man speak!” it thunders forth.

It is Thuriot, who has just replaced Collot d’Herbois in the chair.

“I demand a hearing!” vociferates the Incorruptible, “and I will be heard!”

“You shall not!”

“I wish to speak!” cries a deputy, taking at the same time possession of the tribune.

It is Vadier.

Thuriot rings the president’s bell.

“Vadier has speech!”

“Yes, Vadier! Vadier!” members exclaim from all sides.

Robespierre continues to protest, disputing frantically with his neighbours in his fury.

“It is infamous treachery! Infamous!”

Again they call out—

“Vadier! Silence! Vadier! Vadier!”

“*Citoyens!*” commences Vadier—

But the speaker is interrupted by Robespierre who furiously persists in claiming a hearing.

“Compel him to be quiet!” cries some one.

Thuriot rings his bell, and orders Robespierre to let Vadier speak.

“Vadier is to speak! Silence!”

Robespierre once more resigns himself to his fate, and returns to his place.



The tumult dies away in a low murmur, above which Vadier's mellifluous voice is heard.

"*Citoyens!*" he begins, "not until the 22nd Prairial did I open my eyes to the double-dealing of that man who wears so many masks, and when he cannot save one of his creatures consigns him to the scaffold!"

Laughter and applause run round the assembly. Thus encouraged, Vadier continues —

"Only listen to him. He will tell you, with his usual modesty, that he is the sole defender of Liberty, but so harassed, so discouraged, so persecuted! . . . And it is he who attacks every one himself!"

"Hear, hear!" shouts a voice. "Excellent! That's it, exactly!"

"He says," continues Vadier, "that he is prevented from speaking. Yet, strange to say, no one ever speaks but he!"

This new sally is hailed with renewed roars of laughter, and on every side members are convulsed with merriment. Robespierre writhes in his seat, casting glances of hatred and contempt around him.

But Vadier is in the right mood, and goes on —

"This is his regular refrain: 'I am the best friend of the Republic, and as So-and-so has looked askance at me, So-and-so conspires against the Republic, since I and the Republic are one!'"

Again laughter and cheers. "Very good, Vadier! That's it, Vadier!"

By this time the orator's ironical and facetious allusions have served their purpose well, covering Robespierre with ridicule, and lowering him in the eyes of many who were still wavering, hardly daring to join the opposition.

But Vadier, carried away by success, wanders presently from the main point, and loses himself in a maze of petty details. He repeats anecdotes going the rounds of taverns and wine-shops, speaks of Robespierre's spies dogging the heels of the Committee, and quotes his personal experience. The attention of the assembly begins to flag. Robespierre feels this and, taking instant advantage of it, tries to bring the Convention back to a sense of its dignity.

"What! can you give credence to such arrant nonsense?"

But Tallien has realised the danger, and rushing towards the tribune cries —

"I demand a hearing! We are wandering from the main question!"

"Fear not! I shall return to it!" replies Robespierre, who has now reached the semicircle, and tries to enter the tribune by another stairway.

But several members standing on the steps push him back.

"No! we will have Tallien! Tallien!"

"After me!" cries Robespierre, still struggling.

"Tallien! Tallien has speech now!"

But Robespierre climbs up by the banister with the fury of a madman.

“Unjust, infamous judges! Will you then only listen to my enemies!”

The Incorruptible is answered by the one cry rising from a hundred throats.

“Silence! Order! Order! Tallien! Tallien!”

Tallien is in the tribune.

“*Citoyens!*” he breaks out in a stentorian voice.

“Hold! Scoundrel!” shouts Robespierre, desperately.

“Have the madman arrested!” cries a voice in the crowd.

Robespierre still does his utmost to force a passage on the stairway.

“I will speak! I will be heard, wretches! I will speak!”

The uproar increases, aggravated by Robespierre’s boisterous pertinacity. The jingling of Thuriot’s bell at last restores order, though not without difficulty.

The opening words of Tallien’s speech are already audible, amidst enthusiastic cheers. Robespierre, held firmly by some of the deputies, has ceased his struggles, and stands on the steps in an indignant attitude, his features twitching convulsively, his eyes, glaring in hatred, fixed on the new speaker who is preparing to hurl at him another shower of insults.

“The masks are torn away!” cries Tallien.

“Bravo! Bravo!”

“It was the speech delivered yesterday in this

very hall, and repeated the same evening at the Jacobin Club, that brought us face to face with this unmasked tyrant, this vaunted patriot, who at the memorable epoch of the invasion of the Tuileries and the arrest of the King, only emerged from his den three days after the fight . . .”

Sneers and hisses reach Robespierre, repeated up to the very steps of the tribune, below which he stands.

“This honourable citizen, who poses before the Committee of Public Safety as champion of the oppressed, goes home, and in the secrecy of his own house draws up the death-lists which have stained the altar of new-born Liberty with so much blood!”

Renewed cheers and cries of “Hear! hear!” rise from nearly every seat in the hall.

“But his dark designs are unveiled!” continues Tallien. “We shall crush the tyrant before he has succeeded in swelling the river of blood with which France is already inundated. His long and successful career of crime has made him forget his habitual prudence. He has betrayed himself at the very moment of triumph, when nothing is wanting to him but the name of king! . . . I also was at the Jacobins’ yesterday, and I trembled for the Republic when I saw the vast army that flocked to the standard of this new Cromwell. I invoked the shade of Brutus, and if the Convention will not have recourse to the sword of justice to crush this

tyrant, I am armed with a dagger that shall pierce his heart ! ”

Tallien makes a movement as if to rush on Robespierre dagger in hand ; but he is arrested by a burst of unanimous applause. A hundred deputies have risen and are calling out : “ Bravo, Tallien ! Bravo ! ”

The orator, in an attitude of defiance, gazes steadily at Robespierre, who, grasping convulsively at the railings of the tribune, screams himself hoarse, challenging Tallien and the deputies around, while they answer him with abuse, shaking their fists in his face. It is a veritable Babel of cries, appeals, and insults. The President, now upstanding, vainly tries to restore order with his bell.

At last there is a lull, of which Robespierre attempts to take advantage.

“ Vile wretches ! ” he cries, “ would you condemn me unheard ? ”

But he is answered by a telling home-thrust —

“ It is your own Prairial law we are putting into force ! ”

And applause breaks out again louder than ever.

Robespierre, tired of struggling against the rough gang on the stairway, descends to the centre of the semicircle, and addresses the deputies of the Mountain.

“ Give me a hearing ! *citoyens* ! I pray you give me speech ! ”

He was answered by an ominous cry —

“No! no! The arrest! To the votes for the arrest!”

To the votes! The arrest! Robespierre recoils in terror at the fearful words. His looks travel to the deputies of the centre, those of the Plain as they are called.

“It is to the Plain I address myself and not to these traitors!” he exclaims.

But the Plain remains impassive.

Shouts are now heard from all sides, “The arrest! The arrest!”

Not a single voice mediates in his favour! Not one dares to defend his cause! The crowd in the gallery have remained silent and unmoved from the very outset of the stormy scene.

A cry of anguish rises to Robespierre’s lips. “Villains! Wretches!” he gasps.

But his voice is again drowned.

“You are the villain! To death with the tyrant! To death with him! To the vote for his arrest! To the vote for his arrest!”

Robespierre, now completely exhausted, makes one supreme effort, addressing himself to Thuriot, who is still vainly trying to restore silence with his bell.

“President of assassins, for the last time I demand the right of speech.”

“No! No!” cry all the deputies.

“Then decree my murder. . . .”

But his voice breaks, and the last word is lost in a hoarse cry.

“It is Danton’s blood that chokes you!”

Robespierre, livid at the taunt, turns to the interrupter.

“Danton? It is he, then, you will avenge? Why did you not protect him, cowards?”

Replies are hurled at him from every corner. Had he not gagged Danton’s defenders? Now they were going to avenge him! Now their turn had come!

“Did you not hound him to his death, you curs?” shouts Robespierre, with one last cry of rage.

But a pregnant remark falls on the assembly and hastens the end.

“It is hard work, indeed, to drag down a tyrant!”

There is no more hope for Robespierre.

This interruption recalls the Convention to the danger that threatens them. The turmoil is redoubled. Tallien, from the tribune, which he has not yet quitted, demands of the president that the traitor’s arrest be put to the vote.

“To the vote! To the vote!” echoes through the Hall.

But suddenly an unexpected incident attracts general attention.

A deputy advances to the centre of the semi-circle: “I demand to share my brother’s fate, as I have striven to share his nobler deeds.”

It is Augustin Robespierre, who had returned to Paris the day before, and, acting on a generous

impulse, thus offers the sacrifice of his life, a sacrifice that is accepted out of hand.

“The arrest of the brothers Robespierre!”

“And mine!” calls out Lebas proudly, joining the two.

“And Saint-Just!” cries a voice.

“And Couthon!”

“To the vote! To the vote!”

The president has risen. He will put these arrests to the vote when silence is restored.

“Silence for the voting! Silence!”

“Every one to his seat!”

The deputies take their respective places. Then in the deep and awful silence which follows, under the strained gaze of the mob in the gallery, the president speaks —

“*Citoyens*, I put to the vote, by standing and sitting, the arrest of Maximilien Robespierre, of Augustin Robespierre, of Couthon, of Saint-Just, and of Lebas. Let those who vote for these arrests stand up.”

A hundred deputies rise. They are those of the Mountain.

Seeing the men of the Plain remain motionless, a ray of hope cheers Robespierre's despair.

Since the centre refuses to vote for his arrest, they must be, surely, on his side.

“Oh, ye at least, righteous men of the Plain!” he pleads.

Those of the Plain start, draw themselves up, then



silently and spontaneously rise to a man! It is the death-blow! The whole assembly are now standing. The arrests are unanimously voted.

Robespierre is lost. He totters, and nearly falls on a bench at the foot of the tribune.

The president now officially announces the result of the voting amidst deafening shouts of triumph. The ushers advance to arrest Robespierre, but he rises, livid with rage, and thrusts them aside.

The President sees this.

“Robespierre refuses to obey! Ushers, call in the gendarmes!”

The whole assembly echo his words, and shout: “The gendarmes! Bring in the gendarmes!”

The spectators in the gallery rise in their excitement and join in the general clamour.

“*Vive la Liberté! Vive la Liberté!*”

Robespierre staggers under these crushing blows, and shrieks in his despair —

“Liberty, indeed! She is no more! The triumph of those ruffians is her death-knell!”

But the guards have entered. They surround the accused, and push them towards the door. Robespierre walks with head erect, and folded arms between two gendarmes. He does not even cast a glance on the crowd who had hailed his entrance with loud cheers, and who now hiss and hoot him. The public are descending and mix with the deputies. The whole floor is crowded. The Convention-hall where a loud, incessant buzzing is all that

can be heard, resembles a gigantic beehive, for no single voice is distinguishable in the tempestuous clamour that follows that solemn act at last accomplished.

A cry rises above the universal hum: "Long live the Convention!" but is instantaneously succeeded by another more mighty and prevailing shout: "Long live the Republic!"

Meanwhile the accused have disappeared.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE KNELL OF THE TOCSIN

URBAIN, who had witnessed Robespierre's signal defeat and downfall from a seat in the gallery, ran immediately to the Rue du Martroy, to warn Clarisse and Thérèse that their retreat at the Hôtel de Ville was no longer safe or secure.

The man found Clarisse in the drawing-room. At the announcement of the fearful news, the mother's first thought was for her son.

"Then Olivier is lost!" she cried.

In Robespierre lay her only hope, for Robespierre alone could tear him from the grasp of the Committee. Now that Robespierre was vanquished and powerless, what would become of Olivier? Urbain, though he himself felt apprehensive, tried to reassure Clarisse, and at this moment Thérèse entered the room. She had heard all! What! Robespierre? Their safety, Olivier's safety, was in the hands of Robespierre! She came forward, and asked in amazement —

"What! the man that was here yesterday, our protector, was —"

"Yes, it was he!" answered Clarisse, through her tears, "your grandfather's former secretary."

As Thérèse, still trembling from the shock of hearing that name, was about to answer, Clarisse added hastily —

“Hush, child! Forget all his past, and think of him only as he was yesterday! He is now vanquished and fallen, and with him, alas! falls our last hope!”

Thérèse, putting aside her own fears before her aunt's uncontrollable grief, mastered her emotion and drove back the tears which rose to her eyes, to dry those of Clarisse, speaking words of comfort and hope which she herself could not feel.

“Do not give way to despair, mother! God will watch over us. . . . We have implored Him so much!”

Urbain also tried to comfort her by promising to keep her informed of whatever happened. There was some talk of an insurrection of the Commune, he told her, of an attack on the Convention by an armed force, headed by Coffinhal, who was entirely devoted to Robespierre. Who could tell whether the Incorruptible's vengeance might not be brooding! Once rescued, he would again be all-powerful, and change the face of affairs!

“With him, one never knows what may happen!” continued Urbain hopefully. “He has so many resources, and he is, besides, so popular!”

Clarisse, worn out with grief, was, of necessity, resigned.

“May God's will be done!” she sighed. “I shall wait for you here.”

Urbain left them, and the two women knelt in prayer.

The storm which had hung threateningly over Paris all day now burst out. Night had just set in when streaks of lurid light shot through the darkness, heralding a thunder-storm. Suddenly the sound of a bell was heard. It grew louder and louder, pealing a signal of alarm.

Clarisse had risen and stood erect and pale.

"The tocsin!" she gasped, and then ran to the window, followed by Thérèse.

Troops could be discerned in the distance, brandishing pikes and guns.

A shout reached the two women —

"Down with the Convention!"

Other cries were raised.

"Call out the Sections! Call out the Sections! Long live the Incorruptible!"

The roll of drums was heard. They were beating to arms! Horsemen galloped past in great disorder. Beyond doubt it was an insurrection!

Then some one knocked, and the two women turned.

"Come in!" cried Clarisse.

Urbain appeared, breathless and bathed in perspiration.

"I told you so! Robespierre has been rescued!"

"Rescued!" exclaimed both women, unable to conceal their joy.

"Yes! rescued on the way to the Conciergerie,

and carried in triumph to the Hôtel de Ville, where he now is, with his brother and his friends, Lebas, Couthon, and Saint-Just, rescued with him! It is war to the knife between the Communes and the Convention. Both parties are arming. Coffinhal has had to fall back on the Hôtel de Ville."

The cries outside grew louder and nearer, while the tocsin still rang out.

"To arms! To arms! Long live the Incorruptible!"

"Do you hear? They are stirring up the Sections! They will make a new attack on the Tuileries!"

"And what is to become of us?" asked Clarisse, "and of my son?"

"I don't know about your son. But Citoyen Robespierre has thought of you two. It was he who has sent me."

"To tell us? . . ."

"To tell you that you are no longer safe here. The street is guarded by sectioners. They might come up here at any moment to fire from the windows in case of attack. I have orders to conduct you to the Hôtel de Ville, where Citoyen Robespierre has provided for your safety, but he wishes to see you first. You must wait for him in the ante-chamber of the Commune's Council Hall, where he is at this moment conferring with his colleagues. He will join you as soon as he is at liberty; you have only to follow me. This room communicates

directly through a corridor with the Hôtel de Ville."

"Then let us go!" said Clarisse; and, taking Thérèse by the hand, she followed the man.

The two women crossed a suite of rooms and corridors where officials came and went in hot haste. Urbain led the way, turning now and then to direct them aright. Presently he stopped and said, pointing to a door —

"It is in here!" and he opened it.

Clarisse and Thérèse now found themselves in a room decorated with Revolutionary emblems, the walls covered with a greenish paper. Two candlesticks stood on the mantelpiece.

"It was here Citoyen Robespierre told me to bid you wait. He is in the next room attending a meeting in the Commune's Council Hall."

Whilst he spoke Urbain indicated a door, a little way from that by which the two women had entered, behind which a confused murmur of voices was audible.

"I will go and let him know you are here," he said.

The two women were now alone. Clarisse cast a hasty glance round. The apartment was very plainly furnished; in fact, almost void of furniture. Against a panelling between two doors on the left was a raised platform, on which stood a large copper-embossed table. At the foot of the platform were a couple of chairs and an armchair, the only

other furniture of a room which had all the gloomy appearance of a deserted vestibule.

Just then a flash of lightning ran round the apartment. The two women turned. A bust representing the Republic appeared in the vivid and sudden light, ghastly amid the surrounding darkness, while a trophy surmounting the bust seemed to emit sparks of fire. An awful thunder-clap burst on their ears, and screams and cries reached them through the two windows. Clarisse and Thérèse, taking each other by the hand, tremblingly looked out to see what was happening, and Clarisse recognised the Place de la Grève.

A large crowd, sectioners and populace, swarmed in the square. Cannons were being rolled hither and thither amidst a brandishing of pikes, guns, bayonets, and flags — all the noise and bustle of war and riot mingling with the roar of thunder and the flash of lightning.

“Come from the dreadful sight!” said Clarisse, pulling Thérèse gently away.

At that moment a door opened, and as the two women turned Robespierre appeared, attended by Urbain. The Incorruptible bore unmistakable marks of the anguish of that extraordinary day on his haggard and sunken face.

“Let us sit down!” he said, “I am worn out!” and going towards a chair he sank down on it, wiping great beads of perspiration from his brow. Then he turned to Urbain.



“Open the window, it is stifling!”

He raised his eyes to Clarisse, who was standing near.

“Excuse me. . . but I am almost broken down . . . Come closer . . . Take this chair . . . Urbain has told you how things have gone with me?”

“Yes,” Clarisse answered, seating herself, whilst Thérèse, standing by her side, examined with mixed feelings the face of the man whose terrible name she had so lately learnt.

A painful silence ensued. Clarisse, who burned to question him about Olivier, hesitated in view of the utter prostration of the man before her, whose own head was now at stake, but Robespierre divined her thoughts.

“You are thinking of your son?” he said.

“Yes, my son! Where is he?”

“Alas! I know nothing!” answered Robespierre.

Then, in a fainting voice, he told her of his useless inquiries at the Conciergerie, of the conspiracy of the Committee of Public Safety, who kept Olivier hidden away — where he did not know.

“Had I won the day at the Convention I should have delivered him — but now. . . .”

Clarisse had risen in new terror. Was her martyrdom to recommence? But Robespierre reassured her. He might yet be victorious in the struggle between the Communes and the Conven-

tion. Once master of the Assembly, master of the Committee, he could save Olivier.

“But if . . . but if you should not succeed?” asked Clarisse, allowing her mother’s heart to overcome her.

“He will be saved all the same! His only crime was that he insulted me. At my fall he will be looked upon as a hero. He will be restored to you both . . . to you both,” he repeated gently, looking at Thérèse the while.

“Give me your hand, my child, and do not let it tremble in mine. . . . It is on your youthful love I shall have smiled for the last time. . . .”

Clarisse, deeply moved by the scene, tried to speak, but Robespierre interrupted her —

“In the meantime you must not stay here. . . . You must remain in the room by which you entered. . . . Urbain will fetch you as soon as we have started for the Tuileries, and will take you to a safe retreat, where you will await the course of events. . . . If I am vanquished again you are also free. . . .”

And looking at them sadly he added —

“For are not you also my victims?”

Clarisse, touched with pity, stopped him and spoke words of consolation. Why should he talk as if everything were lost!

Alas! Everything was nearly lost! He had been persuaded to hasten the attack on the Convention. It was a trap that had been set in vengeance.

"But by whom?" asked Clarisse.

"By the dead!"

Clarisse and Thérèse were startled.

"The dead?"

"Yes . . . But you cannot understand . . ."

Robespierre looked straight before him as if following the train of some fleeting thought. . . . Suddenly he rose.

"Enough of that, however. Let us think of your safety."

He then beckoned to Urbain, who advanced.

"Conduct the *citoyennes* to the next room, and do as I have already instructed you!"

Loud cries and calls from the Commune's Council Hall, resounded through the open door.

"Go quickly! My friends are coming!" said Robespierre, as he hastened the departure of the two women, conducting them to the threshold of the antechamber. But his friends, Lebas, Augustin Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, Fleuriot-Lescot, Coffinhal, Payan, Dumas, were now entering, shutting the door sharply behind them, in a great flurry in their impatience to be alone.

"This is hardly the moment to dally with women!" exclaimed one of them in irritation.

It was Coffinhal, vice-president of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and one of the most ardent promoters of the insurrection. Robespierre replied in a weary tone—

"For God's sake, have not I the right to be a man!" and he sank into an armchair.

Just then the door opened again. A group of patriots entered in great excitement, speaking at the top of their voices, and gesticulating wildly. They immediately surrounded Robespierre. What was to be done? they asked. Were they to march on the Tuileries? If the attack were put off any longer the Convention would take the offensive. . . . Every moment was precious! It was really ridiculous to beat to arms and ring the tocsin, and then waste time discussing all night long! What were they waiting for, and for whom?

Some of the patriots approached the windows. The howling crowd which, a few minutes ago swarmed in the Place de la Grève, had perceptibly thinned.

Robespierre remained seated, silently wiping his brow, irritated beyond measure by all this needless commotion. At last out of all patience, he started up. . . . What prevented him from marching forward? What was he waiting for? Waiting! He was purely and simply waiting for Paris, the whole of Paris, which at the voice of his friends, must rise in his defence! Had they come? Yes, they had come . . . and gone again, too! He had only to look out on the square to convince himself of it! . . .

The groups round the windows gave signs of assent.

"They have grown tired of waiting," said Fleuriot-Lescot.

“And it is their supper-time,” observed the In-  
corruptible, with a bitter smile as he sat down  
again.

The sky was suddenly overclouded, and rain  
poured down in torrents.

“That will help to empty the square!” observed  
Robespierre.

The patriots now leant out of the windows trying  
to call back those who were running to escape the  
shower.

“Hallo, there! Wait a while! Where are you  
running to, cowards? Everything is ready for the  
onset!”

Lebas, who had also approached one of the  
windows, stood back discouraged.

“They are deserting us by hundreds!” he ex-  
claimed.

The patriots again eagerly pressed Robespierre.  
There was all the more reason for them to march  
on the Tuileries at once.

“Decide, for goodness’ sake!” said Coffinhal;  
“enough time has been lost already!”

Robespierre rose from his seat, and answered  
wearily —

“Very well! let us go! And God grant that the  
defenders of the Convention be as valiant as ours!”  
he added in bitter sarcasm.

“Before starting,” suggested Payan, “you had  
better sign this last proclamation. It will serve to  
rouse the sectioners of the Pignes Quarter.”

“Very well! Give it to me!”

Lebas handed him a pen.

Robespierre wrote the first letters of his name, Rob. . . .

He stopped suddenly. A distant sound, as of a trumpet-call, rang out in fearful warning. They look at each other anxiously. What could it be?

A man ran in upon them, in breathless haste. It was Didier, Robespierre's agent.

“The attack!” he panted. “The troops of the Convention are coming upon us, led by Barras!”

“But what does it all mean?” they cried wildly. “What has happened?”

There was not a moment to lose! The assailants were advancing in double column; Leonard Bourdon reading by the light of the torches the decree of the Convention declaring the insurgents outlaws. Yes, outlaws! Anybody was at liberty to fire on them!

“But the people,” asked Lebas, “the people are with us?”

No! the people were no longer with the insurgents. They had turned back, and were following the assailants with loud cheers. Robespierre and his friends could even then hear their deafening shouts and threats.

“Hark! Do you hear them?” said Didier. “They are on the quay!”

Now followed a regular panic. The maddest proposals succeeded each other. They ought to

fall back on to the Faubourg! said one. No, to the arsenal! suggested another.

But Robespierre resolutely and authoritatively interposed —

“It would be absolute madness! Prepare yourselves for the fight! Get the guns ready. There are artillerymen enough in the square to shoot them all down.”

“Yes! That is the best plan! The Incorruptible is right.”

Coffinhal ran to the window to give a signal to the gunners. A loud cry of “Long live the Republic!” answered him. Robespierre recommended prudence to Coffinhal. He must instruct the gunners to let the enemy first reach the square, and then at close quarters fire on them, while Bourdon would be reading the decree.

Every one approved this plan, and the order was repeated to Coffinhal. Prudence and self-possession were necessary. Didier, on being questioned, assured them that the cannon still commanded the square. They were a match for any assailants! Robespierre continued to give orders. The patriots in the next room, the General Council Chamber, must be informed of the plan. Lebas went to open the door, but started back on the threshold.

“The room is empty!” he cried. “The cowards! they have fled!”

They looked at each other in dumb amazement. The men on watch at the windows now announced

that the assailants were in sight. They could discern the gleam of torches, but the gunners had not moved.

Again that brazen trumpet-call fell ominously on their ears, accompanied by the low rumbling of distant thunder. A sudden roll of drums burst out, and then all was hushed. The sound of a voice, coming up from the square in solemn, measured tones, broke upon the silence.

“In the name of the French Republic, the National Convention decrees Robespierre and all those who have taken part in the rebellion to be out of law.”

A vague, indistinct murmur now arose from the square.

The voice continued with startling resonance—

“*Citoyens!* the Convention command you to make way for us!”

Robespierre and his friends were leaning out of the windows breathless with suspense, their eyes fastened on the artillery.

“Why don’t they fire?” said Coffinhal.

Robespierre leant on a bar of the window, his hands clenched over it, his face pale, perspiration trickling down his forehead.

“Can’t you fire at them, you dolts!”

Ah! they were getting their guns ready; they would fire now!

There was a sudden movement of relief and hopefulness that lasted only for a moment and then gave place to horror.



The sectioners had turned their cannon against the Hôtel de Ville!

One cry, the despairing cry of the vanquished, echoed through the room.

“We are betrayed! *Sauve qui peut!*”

Then followed an indescribable scene of panic. All was irreparably lost. Defeat, merciless and sanguinary, stared them in the face. Cries and shouts came up from the square, but one cry rose above all.

“*En avant!* Forward!”

Drums beat the charge.

Some ran to the doors, others to the windows to get upon the roof. Augustin Robespierre already on the ledge of one of the windows, prepared to escape by the cornice. His foot slipped and he fell on to the pavement amidst derisive shouts.

“They shall not have me alive!” cried Lebas, drawing two pistols from his belt; and he placed one on the table near Robespierre, who had fallen prostrate on a chair.

“That is for you, Robespierre! Adieu!” and he rushed out.

Robespierre looked at the pistol, and pushed it aside with an expression of utter weariness.

“Why should I? Let death come as it pleases!”

Just then a door opened and Clarisse, breathless with fear, rushed in, clasping Thérèse tightly by the hand. Fearful and threatening sounds entered with her through the open door.

Robespierre turned and saw her.

“Unhappy woman! Not gone yet!”

Almost mad with terror, she told him that they could not escape, the assailants were at their heels.

Robespierre wildly seized the pistol from the table and pointed to the other exit.

“Fly that way! I will kill the first to gain time!”

Clarisse dragged Thérèse towards the door, but recoiled with a terrified shriek. Loud shouts were heard coming that way. Robespierre rushed forward and pushed them towards another door opposite.

“This way, then! Fly! for pity’s sake, fly!”

Clarisse and Thérèse crossed over to the other exit. But through the door they had just left a fearful cry entered, and nailed them to the spot.

“This way! Follow me!”

It was Olivier’s voice! Robespierre recognised it also, and was struck dumb with horror! All three fastened their eyes on the door in agonised suspense.

Olivier, all dishevelled, his clothes in disorder, appeared on the threshold. His eyes met Robespierre’s, who was standing near the platform. He rushed on him, pistol in his hand, exclaiming—

“Ah! villain. You will kill no one else, now!” and was about to fire, but Clarisse threw herself on him, and held his arm.

“Oh! you, Olivier! you of all the world! Oh! horror!”

And she tore the pistol from his grasp and flung

it away. He looked first at her, then at Thérèse, bewildered at their presence. Robespierre, still grasping his pistol, silently watched the scene. His son's act was his death-blow. Deliberately he turned the muzzle of the weapon towards himself.

"I shall kill no one else . . . but myself!" he sighed, and with the word he pulled the trigger and fell wounded on the steps of the platform. The bullet had broken his jaw.

Clarisse, beside herself at this double shock, rushed to Robespierre's side and attempted to staunch the blood flowing from his wound. As he fell, some drops of blood splashed on the half-signed proclamation, and added a ghastly flourish to the initial letters R . . . o . . . b . . .

Thérèse, standing near Olivier, was weeping bitterly and telling him of the efforts Robespierre had made to save them all.

"He?" cried Olivier, still incredulous.

The room filled rapidly from every side with the assailants armed with pikes, swords, knives, and muskets. They rushed in, screaming and shouting "Victory! Victory!" But all drew back on seeing Robespierre stretched on the ground, bathed in blood. A national representative ran to the window and announced the news to the crowd swarming in the Place de la Grève.

"*Citoyens!* the tyrant has shot himself! The tyrant has forestalled the law! Long live the Convention!"

Cries of "Long live the Convention!" re-echoed from the square, and were taken up and repeated from afar, till they gradually died in the distance.

Robespierre, raising himself with Clarisse's aid, looked around for Olivier and Thérèse among the crowd.

"At all events, the child is saved and you also," he said. . . . "Let me not pass away without your forgiveness!"

"Oh yes! I forgive you!" Clarisse murmured amidst her tears.

"I thank you!" he answered feebly, and fell back fainting.

A rough, commanding voice broke in on Clarisse's grief.

"Take him up!"

Clarisse still remained, kneeling, but they pushed her aside.

"Now then! Get out of the way!"

She rose with difficulty, every limb trembling, and escaped from the crowd with Thérèse and Olivier through an open door. Some men advanced to carry Robespierre away, who looked already like a corpse, with his eyes closed, and the blood gushing through his lips. One man held his head, another his legs, and thus the ghastly burden was carried through the crowd of assailants, who stood aside to make way for it. Clarisse, standing in one of the doorways as the gloomy procession passed, clung to her son, imploring his pity.

"Oh! pardon him! Do you too pardon him! I beg you, pardon him!"

"Make room for the Incorruptible!" shouted a voice in ribald mockery.

They shrunk back, but Clarisse all the while passionately entreated her son to pardon Robespierre.

"Oh, hear me, my son, I implore you! Say that you forgive him!"

"Yes, mother, I forgive him, and may God have mercy on him!" Olivier murmured, casting a long look after the grim procession till it was lost to sight.

Olivier then turned to his mother and his *fiancée*.

"Now, let us get away from here!" he says.

"Is it really true? Are you free?" asked Clarisse.

"Yes, quite free! I will tell you all about it presently. But we must secure a passport if we want to leave Paris. . . . Let us make haste!"

The two women passed out under Olivier's protection, and descended the Hôtel de Ville's grand staircase through the crowd, which followed fallen Robespierre with cries of "Victory! Victory!"

## CHAPTER XV

### DEATH'S KINDLY VEIL

ROBESPIERRE has thus been vanquished for the second time !

Where will they take him ? To the Tuileries, to the Convention, into the very midst of the victorious National Assembly, where the dying despot is to be exposed to the raillery of the populace, before being carried to the scaffold. Robespierre is laid down in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville, and placed with infinite care on a litter. They lift his head and bind up his wound, for he must live long enough to receive the final retribution. The bullet has but half robbed the scaffold of its prey.

Artillerymen now come forward, and take him up again, but Robespierre, still unconscious, knows nothing of what is passing round him. They lift the wreck of what was once the Incorruptible and continue their way. Saint-Just walks in the rear between two gendarmes, his hands bound behind him, very pale, with head erect, and perfectly indifferent to the insults hurled at him — the only one of his allies who is with Robespierre in the hour of defeat. The others are either dead, hidden or

fled. But their turn will come, for hot search is afoot for the cowards and fugitives.

The gloomy *cortège* crosses the Place de la Grève, and moves in the direction of the quay, on its way to the Tuileries, beneath a cloudless sky that smiles after the rain, as the stars are gradually effaced by the first gleams of dawn. It is three o'clock. The *cortège* is followed by a curious and gaping crowd. Passers-by stop and ask, "What is it?"

"Robespierre, who is wounded. They are taking him to the Convention."

Then the inquirers' faces light up with joy.

"It is all over, then! . . . The tyrant is going to die! . . . There will be no more scaffold!"

And the passers-by joined the crowd.

But at the Convention the order had been given that the "monster" was not to be received. Even a captive and almost a corpse, they will not allow Robespierre again to cross the threshold, once he has been banished from their midst. The Incorruptible, as an outlaw, belongs to justice only. So the wounded man is taken up and laid at the foot of the grand staircase leading to the Committee of Public Safety.

There, on the very spot where, two days before, Robespierre, returning from the Conciergerie, hurled defiance at Billaud-Varenes, he now lies on a litter, vanquished, ruined, gasping out his life!

A peremptory order is given, and flies from mouth to mouth. Robespierre is to be transported to the

Committee's waiting-room. Saint-Just walks in front now, with Dumas, President of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who has been discovered hidden in a corner of the Hôtel de Ville, and several others whose arrest and arrival is also announced.

The litter is carried into the room. Robespierre still unconscious is lifted out and laid on a table, and his head is pillowed on a deal box, containing samples of munition bread. His shirt, loosened at the neck, and leaving the throat bare, is covered with blood which still flows freely from the mutilated jaw. The sky-blue coat is soiled and torn, the nankeen breeches, the white stockings, washed and ironed by Cornélie Duplay, are now all stained and disfigured.

The Incorruptible is a mutilated mass, but a living mass, still breathing and still suffering.

Robespierre has opened his eyes; he raises his right hand, groping instinctively for his handkerchief, wishing to wipe his mouth. His trembling fingers come in contact with a white leather pistol-case, which he lifts to his lips to staunch the blood. By an irony of fate the case bears the inscription—*“The Great Monarch; Lecourt, manufacturer to the King.”*

Robespierre appears to revive. He looks round, and his eyes fall on Saint-Just and Dumas, side by side in the recess of one of the windows, shrugging their shoulders at the rudeness of the people who pass through the room and stare at them as if they



were curiosities. The insults are now directed against Robespierre, who turns away: — "There is fallen majesty for you!" exclaims one. . . . "Majesty laid low," says another. . . . "With his bandages he looks like a mummy or a nun!" . . . "Yes, a nun with her head-gear awry!" . . . "He is thinking of his Supreme Being! It's just the right moment!"

But Robespierre, under this railing clamour and abuse, does not stir. There he lies, stretched out motionless, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, the very embodiment of silent scorn. Slowly and without a word, he drinks the cup of bitterness; he will drink it so, to the very dregs. A conqueror, he would have been to them a god; vanquished, they nail him to the pillory. Such is the constant perfidy of human nature! And yet he had been so near success, so near! If the Convention had not proved so cowardly at the sitting, had not succumbed directly before Tallien's attack! . . . If they had but let him speak! If they had allowed him to defend himself! But the plot had been too well laid. Then Robespierre's thoughts wander to the other wretches, the Communes, the cowards on whom he had counted, the vile traitors and base deserters!

His bitter meditations are suddenly cut short by a shooting pain in the knee, which runs through him like a knife. It is his garter, which is too tightly drawn. He raises himself and stretches out his hand to undo it, but his strength fails, and he falls

back again. Suddenly he feels some one gently loosening it. He lifts himself again and bends forward. Can he be dreaming? That young man . . . yes, it is Olivier! . . . Olivier, himself!

"Oh, thank you, my . . . thank you, my . . . thank you, monsieur!" he says hastily.

He is on the point of saying, "my son!" but has strength enough left to recollect himself. No! Olivier must never know the secret of his birth, never, never!

Robespierre falls back again. The emotion is too much for him, and he faints away.

Yes, it is Olivier, who has just obtained from the Committee a passport for his mother, his *fiancée*, and himself. Crossing the waiting-room he had seen Robespierre stretched out on the table in front of him. Touched with pity at his vain and painful attempts to undo the garter, he had come to his assistance.

Olivier now leaves the Committee of Public Safety to rejoin Clarisse and Thérèse, who are waiting for him in the Tuileries Gardens, and overcome with fatigue have sat down on a bench, and seeing them in the distance hastens his steps.

"I have the passport!" he exclaims.

"Then let us go, and lose no time!" Clarisse answers; "let us return to Montmorency, at once! I long to leave the city of woe and misery."

"We cannot go yet," replies Olivier. "The passport must bear the stamp of the Committee of

General Security to be of any use, and I must present myself before the Committee at three o'clock."

"Then, what are we to do? Where shall we go?" asks Clarisse wearily.

"We can only go to the Rue du Rocher, to Leonard's landlady. She will receive me with open arms, you will see, now she has no longer Robespierre to fear."

It is five o'clock, and day has just dawned. The air is soft and fresh, the sky above of sapphire blue; the trees, the streets, the very houses, seem smiling with renewed life, after the refreshing shower.

In this brightening dawn Robespierre is being taken to the Conciergerie, for the Committee of Public Safety have altered their decision. Robespierre and his accomplices, now found and arrested, are to be confined in the Conciergerie in order to undergo the formality of identification. From thence they are to be taken to the scaffold without trial or judgment, as outlaws.

So Robespierre is replaced on the litter, followed by the gaping crowd. He sleeps the whole way, lulled by the measured tread of the men who carry him, and only awakes to find himself in a narrow cell, in charge of a gendarme.

"Can I write?" he asks.

"No!"

"Where am I?"

"At the Conciergerie."

His eyes flash for a second. He looks round uneasily and repeats — “At the Conciergerie! In what part of the Conciergerie?”

“Between the Queen’s cell and the Girondins’ Chapel.”

Between his victims! He is between his victims! The fearful warning on the prison walls passes again before his eyes: “Robespierre, your hour will come! . . .” The dead were right! If he had done away with the guillotine in time, he would perhaps not be there, himself a victim of the Terror he had let loose! But he could not! No, he could not, it was too soon. . . . He would have been engulfed in the turmoil, just the same! . . . In continuing the Revolutionary Tribunal, in keeping the executioner at his post, he was merely protecting his own head!

His mind is flooded with ideas. . . . He is dreaming vaguely, his dim eyes fixed on the low ceiling of his cell. . . . His youth smiles at him through the mist of years, every detail of the past comes back to him in clear and lucid vision.

He sees Clarisse seated at her harpsichord, he is turning over the leaves of her music . . . but the vision trembles, and then fades away. Fever gradually rises to his brain, takes entire possession of him, and deadens his senses, so that he is completely unconscious, and when Fouquier-Tinville, his creature of the Revolutionary Tribunal, his accomplice in the days of bloodshed, comes

forward to identify him, he does not recognise his voice.

The end is now approaching. At five in the afternoon the gendarmes come to conduct Robespierre to the scaffold. The Convention has decreed that for this occasion the guillotine shall be erected at the Place de la Révolution. Robespierre is borne on the litter through the crowd of prisoners, the victims of his hatred and his laws, and when the dying man has passed the threshold they breathe again. With him death departs and new life comes in.

The tumbril is waiting in the courtyard, surrounded by a crowd of *sans-culottes* and Mænads, and hundreds of spectators eager to witness the startling spectacle, are swarming in the streets to hoot and abuse Robespierre as heartily as they had cheered and applauded him at the Fête of the Supreme Being! To effect this startling change one sitting of the Convention has sufficed!

Robespierre is now in sight. This is the signal for the wildest uproar. He is seated on a bench in the first tumbril, and fastened against the bars of the cart to keep him from falling. The fresh air has revived him; he allows them to do as they please, looking on in silent scorn. Others of the condemned are placed in the same tumbril: Augustin Robespierre, Saint-Just, Dumas the president, Hauriot, and Couthon. The two last are seated right and left of Robespierre. Four other carts follow,

equally loaded. The condemned number twenty-two in all.

Now Robespierre's *via dolorosa* begins.

Abuse and insults rain down on them in torrents, covering Robespierre and his accomplices with ignominy.

The ghastly procession crosses the Pont-au-Change, the Quay de la Mégisserie, and passing the Rue de la Monnaie it enters the Rue Saint-Honoré.

Curses are heard mingling with the shrieks of the rabble, for among the crowd there are many victims of the Terror, widows and orphans conjuring up the memory of all their anguish, all the drama of the guillotine, the work of the Incorruptible.

A woman clutches at the tumbril in which Robespierre sits, a woman whose two children had been torn from her by the Prairial law.

"Monster!" she cries, "vile monster! in the name of all mothers, I curse you to hell!"

The crowd following the *cortège* grows denser as it proceeds. It is *Decadi*, the Republican Sunday. All Paris is out of doors. The windows and balconies are thronged with men and women in festal attire, pressing forward to see the procession file past, and showering down shouts of joy and triumph, for the passing of those tumbrils means also the passing away of the reign of Terror.

Robespierre continues his dreadful way, his eyes fixed and glassy, his face wrapped in the bandage

which holds his jaw together, and partly hides it like some ghastly mask. By his side sits Hauriot, livid and terrified, covered with the mud and filth of the sewer into which he had fallen. Couthon and Augustin Robespierre, pitifully mutilated, are lying at the bottom of the cart. Saint-Just alone stands erect, his hands bound, and retains his scornful air.

The tumbrils enter the Rue Saint-Honoré near the Jacobin Club, where two days before the Incorruptable reigned supreme. The martyrdom is not over. They are before the house of the Duplays.

The *cortège* stops.

At a given signal a child dips a broom in a pail of blood, and sprinkles the front door.

“Ha! Robespierre, here is your cavern branded with the blood of your victims!” cries a voice.

A plaintive howl is heard from behind the blood-smearred door. It is Blount, who has scented his master. Robespierre shuts his eyes but it is useless, for he can hear!

People question each other in the crowd. Where are the Duplays? In prison! The father at Plessis, the mother at Sainte-Pilagie with her young son. Lebas has killed himself! His body is there in one of the carts. As to the daughters, they have fled, most probably.

But now for the guillotine!

The *cortège* continues its way, while the heart-rending moans of Blount can still be heard in the distance. That cry of the faithful dog, recognising

his master and calling to him, is the last adieu to Robespierre from his recent home.

The first tumbril is already at the top of the Rue Saint-Florentin. A man turns out of the street and runs in the direction of the Rue de la Révolution.

The crowd cry after him—

“Hallo, there! will you not see the Incorruptible’s head cut off? Stop! stop! Don’t be so chicken-hearted!”

But the man is already far away. It is Olivier, returning from the Committee of General Security, where he had at last succeeded in having his passport countersigned, after endless trouble. He tries to cross the Rue Saint-Honoré, but the crowd fills the street; so he retraces his steps, followed the Jardin des Tuileries, and reaches the Rue Saint-Florentin, at the very moment when the tumbrils are at hand.

Away from them he hurries, towards the Rue de Rocher, where Clarisse and Thérèse are impatiently awaiting him in their room. The landlady, anxious to be taken back to favour, has been worrying them with officious attention since the morning.

Olivier bursts in upon them eagerly—

“It’s done! Now we can start! Is the carriage ready?”

The widow Beaugrand is in despair.

“Then you have decided to go? Will you not wait until to-morrow? I have such a nice supper prepared!”



Olivier grows impatient. Clarisse and Thérèse get ready to start.

"It's all right! Everything is arranged," says the landlady. "The carriage has been ordered, and is just two steps from here."

She hastens downstairs, followed by Olivier and the two women, who wait outside. The street is deserted. The day melts in a soft twilight. Stars already twinkle in the cloudless sky. Light, happy laughter comes from a balcony opposite, the echo of childish merriment, which soon ceases with the closing of a door.

The carriage has arrived, an open *char-à-banc* with four seats. Olivier helps his mother and his *fiancée* in, then climbs up on the box beside the driver.

"To Montmorency! And take the shortest cut!"

The carriage rolls away amidst the farewells and good wishes of the widow Beaugrand. However, at the end of the Rue du Rocher it stops suddenly and draws up to the side of the road. Two carts are coming at full gallop, driven by men in red nightcaps. Olivier asks impatiently—

"What is the matter now?"

"It's the dead bodies of the condemned, *citoyen*; they are taking them to the Cemetery des Errancy. Ah! now, the Incorruptible can kill no more!"

The two women have heard!

Clarisse and Thérèse fall on their knees, their

hands clasped, and their eyes lifted in prayer. Olivier bares his head. The carts are passing. Clarisse and Thérèse make the sign of the cross. Olivier, pale with emotion, follows their example, turning towards Thérèse and his mother, whose eyes dwell with strange emotion on his face. Her tear-dimmed gaze is full of mute thanksgiving, the secret of which Olivier will never know.







